

THE CLAN RANALD:  
HISTORY OF A HIGHLAND KINDRED

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BY

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"We're in descent yet."

Mrs. Catherine MacPhee, nee  
MacPherson, resident in habitable  
section of Nunton House, Benbecula,  
6th July 1977.

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## PLACE NAMES AND PERSONAL NAMES

Where possible, place names used in this study are given the spellings found on the modern Ordnance Survey maps. In cases where an old place name does not appear on these maps, the most common spelling found in local histories is used; failing that, the most frequently used version from the sources is used. Personal names are modernised where it is clear what the form should be; where it is not clear, the original spelling has been retained.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to define Highland kin-based society as it existed towards the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century and to examine the pressures working to change that society in the period down to the clearances of the mid 19th century. This goal is approached through the method of an in-depth study of the Clan Ranald.

This kindred was selected because it is well covered in documentation: both the more traditional official, family, estate, political and ecclesiastical Scottish sources and Gaelic material, including bardic poetry, historical chronicles and vernacular poetry. The Clan Ranald was also selected because it occupied a position of geographical and political importance throughout the period under consideration. The area encompassed by this work is basically limited to the old Clan Ranald territories: Moidart, Arisaig and Morar on the mainland; the islands of Eigg and Canna in the Inner Isles, and South Uist and Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides. In one sense, however, this scope is expanded in the pre-1760 period because a loosely structured community of conservative west Highland kindreds had a special importance to the general focus of this study. This group included the Clan Ranald and is shown to have been distinctive and culturally defensive in political and religious issues from the Lordship of the Isles, through the seven risings that attempted to restore the Lordship, through the Montrose period, down to the Jacobite era. The common history of these clans is central to this inquiry into the decline of the kin-based culture of the Gael and to the development of the Clan Ranald.

All segments of the Clan Ranald's internal structure are examined: the ceann cinnidh, "head of the kindred", the daoine-uisle, "nobles of the kindred", the professionals, such as bards, pipers and physicians, and the majority of the clan, the commoners. Their situation and interrelationships are examined and their interdependence is illustrated. However, over a long period, various forces combined to undermine this society. Political, religious, economic and cultural pressures were heavy and the introduction of new political and economic systems in the mid to late 18th century had the effect of disrupting the old social order and dividing the classes of Highland society. In some cases, such as the Jacobite Risings, these pressures for change fell on the whole kindred, but, increasingly, members of the various ranks in the clan began to feel more specialised forces working on them in particular and not the entire kindred. The origins of these pressures for change and the distinctive consequences they had on the several levels of the old clan are examined down to the sale of the estate and the clearances in South Uist and Benbecula. The historical interdependence between Highland ranks will be shown to have been replaced by the seeds of class antagonism.

## INTRODUCTION

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This inquiry has grown out of an interest in the historical Gaelic culture of Scotland and the changes that have overtaken it, changes that to an extent have emptied the glens and islands of the native people and their language. Today, the Highlands and Islands are not barren of people and the Gaelic language lives, but certainly many crises have disturbed and altered the area. In this process many elements of the 17th and 18th century Gaelic culture have been lost or modified and it is certain that modern Gaels continue to lament aspects of that loss.

History has left Scotland's Gaels with a complex and sometimes contradictory set of attitudes and feelings about themselves and their heritage. The folk memory of today's common Gaelic-speaking people stretches back to the clearances, leaving these folk with a residue of negative attitudes about their own culture, attitudes born in stress, rational observation and sure knowledge; and yet on an emotional level these same people exhibit positive feelings towards that part of themselves and their culture that makes them unique. Paradoxically, many of the qualities that make today's Gaels distinct and give them cause for pride grew out of the same heritage that fostered the clearances. It is possible to balance these rational negative attitudes with the contradictory and yet somehow interlocked positive emotions. On one level this study attempts to assess the historical aspects of this fundamental issue.

More basically, this study will focus on the various factors leading to the decline of the kin-based Gaelic society of the last half of the 17th, the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries.



It will not be possible to investigate the changes working on that society without understanding what it was. So, within this single theme there must be two basic thrusts: first, an attempt to define as closely as possible what that Highland society was at the start of the period under question and, second, to examine the various factors leading to its decline. It is felt that the best method for reaching these goals is an indepth study of a particular kindred. This approach will also allow a close look at the internal structure of this clan.

The selection of the specific kindred is obviously of the utmost importance as this choice will set the direction and scope for this investigation. In this field there are many appealing possibilities, but the kindred that seems best suited to the goals of this study is the Clan Ranald. There are a number of reasons for this choice, but two are paramount. Firstly, a reasonably full amount of documentation relating to the Clan Ranald has survived in both Scots and Gaelic sources. The "Clan Ranald Papers"<sup>1</sup> are available in the Public Record Office in Edinburgh. This collection of family and estate papers is large and holds much of interest. The Clan Ranald is also fortunate in that a fair amount of its Gaelic literature has survived both in terms of poetry and of chronicles. These sources, combined with the many other traditional sources, give this clan a substantial, though not perfect, level of coverage. The second major reason for this particular selection is that this is an inquiry into the kin-based Gaelic culture and its decline, and the Clan Ranald remained conservative well into the period for which a reasonable amount of documentation exists.

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1. See Appendix for a discussion of the Clan Ranald muniments.  
(Appendix I, p.1.)

For many other kindreds this is simply not true. While it is wrong to believe there is no documentation for Highland history, it can be patchy and in certain cases almost non-existent, much having been lost. Documentation for the 16th and early 17th century Highlands can be unreliable and it was during this period that a considerable number of Gaelic kindreds lost much of their traditional appearance. Happily, the Clan Ranald remained conservative longer, well into a more fully documented period. Consequently, it is possible, for example, not only to look at the surviving literature of the Clan Ranald's MacMhuirich bards, but also to study the historical position of these poets themselves.

There are several other factors making the Clan Ranald an appealing selection. The Chiefs of Clan Ranald held South Uist and Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides, Eigg and Canna in the Inner Hebrides and the districts of Moidart and Arisaig on the mainland, plus certain other lands on the isles and mainland at various periods. This geographical cross-section is of interest. The leadership of this clan was MacDonald and the MacDonald interest was of considerable importance in Highland matters.

One further aspect lends special interest to the Clan Ranald. It was active among the significant core of conservative west Highland kindreds; indeed, its chiefs achieved positions of leadership over this unstructured yet distinct group of clans on several occasions. The Clan Ranald had been a central element in the hierarchy of the Lordship of the Isles and even after the fragmentation of that political sphere, the surviving kindreds of the old Lordship remained something of a focal point for Scotland's Gaelic interests. This collection of traditionally minded western clans

remained intact well into the 18th century. To an extent their common history is important to the political decline of Gaeldom and it will be examined when it relates to the central focus of this study.

Here one point should be emphasised. This work is not a "clan history" in the ordinary sense; rather, it sets out to assess the political, economic, religious and cultural pressures that worked to alter the society of the west Highlands and Isles in the period under question by the method of an indepth study of one significant kindred, the Clan Ranald. Moreover, this is a study of that entire kindred, not merely the chief and his immediate family. A clan was never simply a small elite comprised of the chief and his near relatives; it was a large and complex collection of inter-related peoples, some in terms of kinship and all in terms of mutual need. Where documentation permits, all levels of society will be analysed. And, finally, it is important to note that this "MacDonald" kindred was not only comprised of several classes, but also among those various levels were scattered a number of distinct kin-groups. In certain cases the non-MacDonalds of Clan Ranald were more important to the kindred than many of its MacDonalds and, in several cases, of greater interest. Professional families in the Clan Ranald, such as the MacMhuirichs, Beatons and MacIntyres, held positions of greater importance than many of the clan's MacDonalds and, historically, their significant positions and contributions were recognised and rewarded by the MacDonald leadership.

In a sense the 200 years encompassed by this study can be seen as the culmination of a much longer process of change. Only within that larger context can the issues central to this work be



understood. It is not possible to comprehend the evolution of the clan, the breakdown of the kin-based system or the crisis period of the clearances without some knowledge of earlier Highland history. It is from this earlier period, especially after the fall of the Lordship of the Isles, that the developments central to this study must be joined and it is to this early history that this inquiry must now turn.

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Gaelic Scotland's focal point in the Middle Ages, the Lordship of the Isles, had its origins deep in the past. The Irish connection was pre-eminent. To early Irish settlers Scotland owes its name, its dynasty, its early religion, the Gaelic language and the powerful Gaelic theme that has entwined itself throughout this northern European nation's history. For centuries the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland were joined by a shared culture with the narrow North Channel that separates northern Ireland from the Highlands and Islands, serving to facilitate contact not impede it. Indeed, it has been noted:

What strikes one most forcibly when examining in detail the system of society obtaining among the Scots of Dalriada and in contemporary Ireland is how often its constituent elements find their precise equivalent in the so-called clan system of later Scotland. 2

When the political fortunes of Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland separated, there remained enduring cultural and artistic ties.

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2. John W.M. Bannerman, "The Scots of Dalriada", Gordon Menzies, ed., Who Are the Scots?, (London: BBC, 1971), p.72.

The institution of the Scottish clan has undergone several periods of significant change since Fergus Mor Mac Erc led the major elements of his kindred, the Dal Riada, from their ancestral lands in present-day County Antrim into Argyll, Lorn and the adjacent Isles. While similarities and cultural ties were to continue, only in the earliest period is it possible to present the Irish kin-based society as an accurate model for Scotland's Gaelic kindreds.

From this early period three distinct features, expansion, religion and the Gaelic culture, should be introduced as they were to be of importance in the development of Gaelic Scotland. In any traditional Gaelic society there was a tendency towards expansion because there was an ever present and ever increasing supply of well-born, able, ambitious and highly regarded brothers and cousins needing land and pressuring the leaders towards expansion. The major elements in early Scottish Dal Riada competed among themselves to extend their territorial control and also engaged in the struggle for supremacy in the north of Britain with their neighbours, the Picts, the Britons and the Angles. In this contest for control of what was to become Scotland, the men of Dal Riada were aided by an Irish factor of the utmost importance, not only to Dal Riada, but also to the development of Scotland, the Celtic church of Colum Cille, or Columba.

Around 563 Columba crossed from Ireland and probably started his monastery on the Island of Iona in 565. The Irish church had developed independent of most outside influences and on native lines. Its own organisation was closely allied to the kin-oriented culture of Gaelic Ireland and this was probably an asset to the Scots in

their conquest over the Picts. It has been said, "the Scoticism of the Picts" was well underway long before the union. Scots had settled in various parts of Pictland and the importance of the church not only in spreading christianity, but also in spreading and "sanctifying" the Scots' culture should be remembered.<sup>3</sup> It also may be that the King of Dal Riada, Kenneth MacAlpin, was aided by a valid claim to the kingship of the Picts through the female line. Other sources, however, suggest that his triumph was the result of military conquest with Irish aid after the Picts had been weakened by a previous Danish attack. In any case it is certain that increasing Norse pressure was a factor and quite likely that those sea raiders helped to push Scot and Pict together to face the common Scandinavian peril.

This success over the Picts highlights the third significant aspect of this early Dal Riadic society. For far too long the culture of the Gaels has been depicted as simply one of blood-feud, theft and slaughter. These were certainly elements of that society, but it is wrong to ignore the rich and varied artistic and intellectual aspects of the Gaelic culture that was entrenching itself in the Highlands and Isles. This culture, the result of Christian and Mediterranean influences combined with Irish pagan and vernacular learning, was impressive in itself, but when compared with that of other contemporary European cultures, its achievements are further enhanced. The monasticism that developed was both ascetic and intellectual. An important off-shoot of this monastic development was the education of the layman. By the 8th century, it has been

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3. Ibid., p.76.

shown, the Gaelic areas had an abnormally high proportion of literary laymen compared with other cultures in contemporary northern Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Material evidence of this esteem for learning and beauty can be seen in the surviving illustrated manuscripts of the Celtic church, especially the Book of Kells. Sadly, Norse raiders and marauding Englishmen have taken a terrible toll of these splendid and irreplaceable Gaelic works of art. Describing a manuscript, now lost, whose beauty seems to have approached that of the Book of Kells, Giraldus Cambrensis, a scholar of the 12th century, said:

You will make out intricacies so delicate and subtle, so exact and compact, so full of knots and links, with colours so fresh and vivid, that you might say that all this was the work of an angel, and not of a man. 5

The same distinctive design style can be seen in the Celtic metal and stone work of the period. The passion for complicated, interwoven, stylised ornamentation that is so beautifully represented in the above physical mediums is also evident in the vernacular literature, especially the poetry, and in the distinctive music of the Gael. The elements so highly prized in the surviving music of the classical bagpipe, the stylised and complicated variations on a given theme, would surely have been present in the music of its Celtic predecessor, the harp. The striking similarities that exist in the physical, oral and musical art forms of this Irish and Highland society surely give an insight into its character.<sup>6</sup>

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4. Bannerman, Who Are the Scots?, op.cit., pp.72-74. Most of the information in this paragraph is drawn from this portion of this article.

5. "Gold from the Dark Ages", Time, 14/10/77, p.47.

6. Kenneth A. Steer & John W.M. Bannerman, Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands, (Edinburgh: H.M.S.O. Press), 1977, and Bannerman, Who Are the Scots? op.cit., p.74.



With the coming of the Lochlannaich, the men of Scandinavia, the western Highlands and Islands entered a new and enlarged north sea world that stretched from Russia to Ireland to Greenland and points west. There was Norse settlement in Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Sutherland, part of Ross and the western Isles. The major importance of this Viking expansion for the Gaels lay not so much in the injection of Norse blood and language, but in the great lesson the Vikings had to teach in the construction of ships and in navigation, plus, to a lesser degree, improvements in weaponry. The west Highlands and Islands have always been a sea world and this Norse legacy helped the Hebridean chiefs master their element.

The Norse domination of the Gaelic west lasted for over two hundred years until it was upset by Somerled, Lord of Argyll. This man, Somhairle Mor Mac Ghillebhrìde, as his name indicates, had Norse as well as Gaelic ancestry, but clearly saw himself as the leader of a rejuvenated Gaeldom independent of foreign masters. Somerled's conquest of the Isles was impressive. After only two battles in 1156 and 1158 the king of Man was forced to flee the Hebrides and return to his Norwegian overlord. In the Annals of Tigernach Somerled is called Rì Indsi Gall & Cìndtìre, "King of Hebrides and of Kintyre", and the Annals of Ulster specifically say that "the men of Argyll and the Isles" acted together in inviting the Abbot of Derry, Flaithbertach O'Brolchan, to become Abbot of Iona. Here is evidence of an early Gaelic political entity in which some form of consent among the leadership was in practice.

Somerled was assassinated in 1164 and his lands were controlled by his descendents who "wer for a gwhyle named and called Clan-somerle". Without the unifying influence of Somerled or another

powerful individual, this kindred soon split into three major factions. First the Clan Dugall under Somerled's son Dugall. The other two kindreds, the Clan Donald and Clan Ruairi, stemmed from sons of Reginald, <sup>one of</sup> Somerled's other sons. These three kindreds nominally owed allegiance to the King of Norway for their island possessions and to the King of Scots for their mainland holdings. However, in reality they exercised as much independence as they could and tended to heed only the more powerful of the two kings at any given time. After the partial and confused Scottish victory at the Battle of Largs in 1263, the Norwegians withdrew in good order and by 1266 they had signed away the western Isles to Scotland.

During the Wars of Independence the Clan Donald and Clan Ruairi supported Robert Bruce and the Clan Dugall backed John Balliol. After the wreck of Balliol's fortunes the Clan Dugall never regained its former position of power. The Clan Donald's fortunes, however, were quite different. Its important assistance inclined King Robert to favour and reward this kindred. This post-war settlement included lands from the former Comyn lordship of Lochaber as well as Morvern and Ardnamurchan, and helped to set the scene for further political development of the Gaelic sphere.

One other important result of the Wars of Independence should be mentioned; this was the rise of a newly elevated kindred with no previous claims to special notoriety. For its support of Bruce this clan received large tracts of land including the old Argyllshire lands of Clan Dugall. The seeds for the future power of this kindred, the Clan Campbell, had thus been planted in the western mainland. It was possibly Bruce's intention to create, with the elevation of this non-Clan Donald or Clan Somairle kindred, something

of a balance of power in the Gaelic west.

The history of the Clan Ruairi is difficult to follow in this post-war period. One of its leaders was killed while supporting Edward Bruce in Ireland and later, on the 6th October 1346, another of its leaders, Ranald MacRuairi was murdered on the eve of the Neville's Cross campaign. Ranald left no issue and the lands of Clan Ruairi fell to his sister Amy MacRuairi. She was married to John of Islay, Lord of the Isles and head of Clan Donald, and so the Clan Ruairi lands came under the sway of the Lord of the Isles and the Clan Donald.

The Clan Ranald finds its eponym with Reginald, son of John of Islay and Amy MacRuairi. The Gaelic equivalent of Reginald or Ranald is Ragnall and is derived from the Norse Rögnvalds.<sup>7</sup> On his father's death Reginald was instrumental in having his brother named as Lord of the Isles. Donald, the new Lord, was the eldest son of John's second marriage to Margaret Stewart, daughter of King Robert II. The tradition that Reginald set aside his own rightful claim to the Lordship "contrary to the men of the Isles" is unlikely. Donald would have held an equal right to the office and his position was stronger. It is probable that the decision had been made as early as 1371, when Robert II, Donald's grandfather, became King of Scots. John's second marriage to Margaret Stewart represented an alliance between the MacDonalds and the Stewarts, the two most powerful kindreds in Scotland, and the benefits of having Donald, the grandson of the king, as their lord were surely obvious to the island leadership.<sup>8</sup> It should also be remembered that the

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7. Alexander MacBain, An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language, (Stirling: Aeneas MacKay, 1911), p.410.

8. Steer and Bannerman, op.cit., pp.125, 204-5.



tradition of Reginald's surrendering his "right" to the Lordship is preserved in the "Book of Clanranald" and that the MacMhuirich, authors of this chronicle, as hereditary bards to the later chiefs of Clan Ranald, may have felt it their duty to portray their chiefs' ancestor, Reginald, as the rightful choice and also as a wise and selfless policy maker.

In the person of Reginald, the Clan Ranald became an amalgamation of both the Clan Donald from his father and the Clan Ruairi from his mother. This kindred, descended from both successful branches of the Clan Somairle, held the old Clan Ruairi lands of the lordship of Garmoran. These included the Isles of Barra, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, St. Kilda, Rhum and Eigg, plus the mainland areas of Moidart, Arisaig, Morar and Knoydart. This powerful territorial footing on the mainland, in the Inner Isles and in the Outer Isles combined with their noble Gaelic lineage gave the chiefs of Clan Ranald a position of great influence in the councils of the Lords of the Isles. The hierarchy of the kindred that existed before the accession of Reginald was not MacDonald; it was MacRuairi. But, interestingly, they became so closely identified with the Clan Donald that some eventually took up the surname of MacDonald.<sup>9</sup> The clan leadership that stemmed from Reginald and his descendants was truly MacDonald with John of Isla and his father Angus Og for ancestors.

Under the Chief of Clan Ranald was a complex and diverse people. This west Highland kindred was kin-based, and not simply at the top. And it certainly was not MacDonald or even purely Gaelic throughout. Immediately under Reginald were his mother's

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9. Ibid., p.204.



(and his own) MacRuairi kinsmen. These Gaelic chieftains represented the current leadership of one of the three major Highland kindreds descended from Somhairle Mor Mac Gillebride. The leaders of this branch of the Clan Somairle were men of consequence. The MacRuairi held positions of power stemming from their own impressive Gaelic ancestry, their support of the winning side in the Scottish Wars of Independence and their territorial possessions. These Gaelic chieftains, served by their own relations, controlled the various areas within the Lordship of Garmoran, probably a chieftain in each major geographical area. This MacRuairi hierarchy, using their Highland galleys to tie together their sea-girt world, cemented the Gaelic culture in their holdings and on its mixed population. Their immediate followers, their relatives, with the possible addition of a few allied but non-related leaders of small local kindreds, served their MacRuairi chieftains as the MacRuairi served Reginald. It is conceivable that these small allied but non-related kindreds were of a mixed Norse or Pictish and Gaelic ancestry. As time passed, Reginald's descendants became more numerous and as the original MacRuairi families found themselves, with each new generation, still further removed from the current clan leadership, there would have been a slow but sure replacement of the old MacRuairi hierarchy with fresh MacDonald individuals. This tendency was basic to traditional Gaelic society and did not represent a preconceived malice against the MacRuairis, but simply a natural reaction to the ever increasing supply of needy brothers and cousins of each new chief. As time wore on, these early MacDonald families would in turn be replaced by a new chief's still fresher kin. This replaced warrior aristocracy would sink to a

lower position in the area power structure or perhaps, using their martial skills, seek employment elsewhere, often in Ireland as mercenaries.<sup>10</sup>

Below this early MacRuairi leadership was a people with Pictish and Norse as well as Gaelic origins. It is well to remember that during the early days of the Kingdom of Dal Riada, before it moved east with Kenneth MacAlpin, the future Clan Ranald lands lay just beyond the fringe of Dal Riadic influence.<sup>11</sup> These were the lands of the northern Picts and seem to have retained much of that character until the arrival of the Lochlannaich, the men of Scandinavia. While limited Gaelic settlement in this area in the pre-Norse period was likely, it is unrecorded. The Scotizing influence of early Celtic missionaries is more certain. With the Norse onslaught every piece of the future Clan Ranald land lay in the forefront of Scandinavian attacks, influence and settlement. This influence is made obvious in the extensive survival of Norse place names in the area, but it seems that the incidence of Viking settlement in these areas was much less than in Orkney and Shetland.<sup>12</sup>

In 1836 Donald Gregory, when speaking of the mixture of Celtic and Scandinavian blood in the Hebrides, said:

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10. Since the 13th century Highland mercenaries had played an important part in Irish warfare, both in struggles with the English and between warring Irish kindreds. These mercenaries were called gall-oglaigh or galloglasses and the existence of this surplus warrior population and the experience they gained in the near Irish martial arena helped to supply the Lords of the Isles and their various kindreds with "an enormous reservoir of experienced fighting men". John Bannerman, "The Lordship of the Isles", Jennifer M. Brown, ed., Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1977), p.216, and G.A. Hayes-McCoy, Scots Mercenary Forces in Ireland, (Dublin: 1937), pp.15-76.

11. Bannerman, Who Are the Scots?, op.cit., p.70. See map.

12. Archibald A.M. Duncan, Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1975), p.83.

The extent to which this mixture was carried is a more difficult question, and one which must be left, in a great measure, to conjecture; but, on the whole, the Celtic race appears to have predominated. 13

Interestingly, as in many other features regarding Gregory's excellent work, subsequent research has done little to alter this observation. So when Somerled's descendants of the Clan Ruairi took control of the Lordship of Garmoran, the native population was mixed. It had a heavy Pictish strain with some Gaelic influence and a more recent overlay of Norse settlement and leadership. Under the MacRuairi rule the native peoples certainly remembered their origins, preserving them in family traditions and in distinctive and recurring family names. But despite their diverse origins, they lived under a Gaelic leadership and were influenced by Celtic churchmen; and since land was not scarce at this period, as long as these pre-Gaelic peoples paid rents and allegiance to their MacRuairi overlords, their old family holdings were probably secure. The process of Gaelicising these people is no more documented in the western Isles than in Atholl or Moray, but it happened. One certain Gaelic influence would be the above mentioned downward infiltration of replaced Gaelic leadership. As powerful individuals and families were replaced by relatives closer to the new chief, they would have carried their Gaelic culture down with them to the next level in the local power structure. Over several generations this process would have had the effect of scattering the culture of the Gael throughout most positions of local influence. It should also be remembered

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13. Donald Gregory, The History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland, from A.D.1493 to A.D.1625, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1975, reprint, 1st ed. 1836), p.8.



that these people of the western Highlands and Isles were not isolated from developments, but at the centre of the thriving Gaelic culture represented and led by the Lord of the Isles.

From his island palace in Islay's Loch Finlaggan, the Lord of the Isles ruled his sea-locked Gaelic principality virtually free of Lowland interference. The authority of the Ri Innse Gall stretched the two hundred and sixty-five island filled miles from the southern most Mull of Kintyre to the northern Butt of Lewis, from the tiny St. Kilda almost to Inverness and his influence was felt in London, Dublin and on the continent as well as in Edinburgh. The many area kindreds owed their allegiance to the Lord of the Isles as the descendant of the earlier "Lords" and "Kings" of the Hebrides and through him to the current head of the Scottish kindred and descendant of Fergus Mor Mac Erc, the King of Scots. While there were occasional differences as to which individual held the best claim to these positions, the island chiefs knew that to overturn this basic structure was to undermine their own claim to power and, in any case, that kin-based structure was central to their own daily life. The Lordship of the Isles was not a foreign institution imposed on the people of the west Highlands and Isles; it represented the accepted, historical focus of that society. It is well to remember that the Gaelic people of Scotland had fought a long series of their own "wars of independence" under Somerled against the Norse to restore this Gaelic political and cultural structure. The remarkable survival of the Lordship of the Isles, despite the lengthy Norse occupation, and the many costly attempts to re-establish it after its 1493 forfeiture testify to the importance placed on it by the Gaelic people. Furthermore, in a period of violence and turmoil

throughout Europe, to say nothing of England and Lowland Scotland, the Lord of the Isles found it safe to reside in his unfortified Finlaggan Palace in Islay. True, the Lord had stout castles at his command, but he chose to live on the tiny isle in Loch Finlaggan.<sup>14</sup> This is strong evidence that the Lord of the Isles was popular and accepted by his folk and their chiefs. That the origins of the Lordship lay deep in the Highland past, that they stretched as far back into the Gaelic consciousness as the embryonic kingdom of Dal Riada and that the Lordship was central to the Gaelic way of life can not be overstressed.

This ancient, accepted and shared cultural heritage contributed to the internal political stability and cohesion of the 15th century Lordship and in turn the Lordship protected that culture and allowed it to flower artistically and intellectually. Places of honour (and material comfort) went not only to mighty island chiefs and their most formidable warriors but also to the highly prized scholars and artists of Gaeldom, the aes dana or "folk of gifts", such as the Beaton physicians and MacMhuirich poets.

A central reason for the Lordship's stability was its "Council of the Isles". This was comprised of the Lord of the Isles, the major chiefs of the member kindreds, the Bishop of the Isles and the Abbot of Iona.<sup>15</sup> These individuals shared some part of the decision making. The exact procedure or extent of this "power sharing" is unknown, but its existence is attested to in various charters from the Lordship. For instance, in a 1469 charter by

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14. Bannerman, Lordship, op.cit., p.238.

15. Donald Monro, Monro's Western Isles of Scotland and Genealogies of the Clans 1549, ed. Robert Munro, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), pp.56-57.

John, Earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles, to his brother Hugh for the lands of Sleat in Skye, the phrase "de consensu assensu et matura deliberacione tocius nostri consilii" or "with the consent, assent and mature deliberation of all our council" appears.<sup>16</sup> This practice doubtless contributed to the noteworthy internal peace enjoyed by the people of the west Highlands and Isles during the survival of the Lordship. Indeed, in 1549 Donald Monro noted of the later Lords of the Isles, "In thair time thair was great peace and welth in the Iles throw the ministration of justice".<sup>17</sup> Here is an excellent contrast to the later period of serious Highland strife caused by the forfeiture of the Lordship and the Edinburgh policy of playing one clan off against another.

In 1493 James IV forfeited the Lord of the Isles. This deed represented a major step in the long and painful process that was the deterioration of Scotland's Gaelic culture. The forfeiture, the most serious disruption in the west Highlands and Isles since the onslaught of the Norsemen, was to have grave consequences for Scotland's Gaels, but the effects of this act were far from immediate. It is only in retrospect that this event can be seen as a clear historical milestone. Since the government in Edinburgh proved unable to enforce its decree in the distant Isles quickly, the members of the Lordship appear to have payed it no more heed than

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16. J.R.N. MacPhail, Publication of the Scottish History Society, Second Series, Vol. V. Highland Papers, "Carta Confirmationis super carta Johannis Domini Insularum facta suo fratri Hugoni Alesondri de Insulis, 10 November 1495", (Edinburgh University Press, 1914), p.97.

17. Monro, op.cit., p.57. See also A. Matheson's review of "Monro's Western Isles of Scotland", in Scottish Historical Review, Vol. xlii (1963), p.50, ft.nt. # 1.



they had the ineffectual forfeiture of 1475 and they continued to act within the context of the Lordship for a number of years. Indeed, it appears that the weakness displayed by John, Lord of the Isles, in confronting this 1493 attack on his office (or, perhaps, his "trust" is more accurate here), combined with his other shortcomings to lead to his deposition as Ri Innse Gall by the leadership of the various Lordship kindreds. They selected John Mor MacDonald of Dunivaig as his replacement and continued to serve him as they had served the previous Lords of the Isles. This deposition is significant. It not only displays an all important institutional flexibility on the part of the Island leadership, but it also demonstrates an ongoing vitality and vigour.

The immediate cause of the second and (eventually) final forfeiture is uncertain, but appears to have been precipitated by problems in Ross. Whatever the cause, the forfeiture met with violent reaction. There were at least seven major risings by the unified Lordship clans in the fifty years following the breaking of the Lordship and, while personal rivalry was occasionally a feature, there is no doubt that the goals of these revolts were the "restoration or rather maintenance"<sup>18</sup> of the Lordship. The most serious of these uprisings occurred in 1544 and 1545 on behalf of Donald Dubh, grandson of John, last officially recognised Lord of the Isles. But after the 1545 death of Donald Dubh, the last widely accepted candidate for the position of Lord of the Isles, the chain of tradition had been broken. It is difficult to imagine a society more structurally ripe for fragmentation than the Gaelic world of

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18. Bannerman, Lordship, op.cit., p.210.

the post-Lordship; and fragment it did.

If the basic structure of the various Lordship clans had undergone changes since the Scottish Wars of Independence, then the forfeiture was eventually to bring about other changes. After the Clan Donald's important aid to King Robert Bruce and the Scottish nation during the Wars of Independence, its descendants had enjoyed a period of comparative security. During this period the leadership of the Isles could identify with the rest of Scotland as having been a part of the successful anti-English struggle. In this atmosphere of relative acceptance and security, there had been a move away from the more limited kin-based structure needed for the protection of the kindred and its lands into the larger and more stable political sphere encompassed by the Lordship. But after the politically unwise forfeiture of the Lordship there was an eventual and serious fragmentation of area political and military power and a marked increase in internal violence and inter-clan warfare. Without the order and security that had been provided by the Lord and his council, the various kindreds were forced to retreat into a more limited defensive kin-based organisation built around the many independent clans. Unfortunately, political deterioration and increased violence were not the only results of the forfeiture; the artists, poets, musicians and craftsmen who had thrived and developed under the Lord's patronage during the previous periods of relative stability were forced to withdraw to Ireland or to move into one of the various kindreds where their scope and financial support were lessened. In this reduced world many of these traditional art forms slowly declined with their society.

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The Clan Ranald's early history before the breaking of the Lordship is not well recorded, but a general outline is discernible. There seems to have been friction between the descendants of Reginald and those of his brother Godfrey, with the Siol Gofraid or "seed of Godfrey", holding special interests in North Uist. The actions of Reginald's children after coming of age are unclear, but they certainly asserted their claim to the leadership of the kindred and enjoyed the support of the majority of the Clan Ranald.

Reginald left five sons and the eldest, Allan, succeeded as the Chief of Clan Ranald. From this man the subsequent leaders of this kindred came to be known by the Gaelic patronymic "Mac Mhic Ailein" or "the son of Allan's son".<sup>19</sup> Another of Reginald's sons, Donald, founded the Glengarry branch of Clan Donald.

During the 15th century the Clan Ranald can be seen taking a leading role in the affairs of the Lordship. The men of Clan Ranald accompanied the army of the Lord of the Isles in the 1411 campaign that led to the Battle of Harlaw and in the early decades of the 15th century it continued its dispute with the Siol Gofraid over lands. In 1427 Godfrey's son and the leader of that kindred, Alexander MacGorrie of Garmoran, who had earlier been described as the leader of two thousand men,<sup>20</sup> was executed at Inverness by James I. After the decay of his kindred their royal titles eventually fell to Hugh MacDonald of Sleat. Hugh's acquisition of the titles to the old Siol Gofraid lands in the Outer Hebrides simply transferred the Clan Ranald's hostility to him and the feud intermittently continued. In the late 15th century ill feelings arose within the Lordship

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19. Gregory, op.cit., p.66.

20. Ibid., p.34.

because the MacDonald interest felt John, Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross, was overly generous with his non-MacDonald vassals, especially the MacLeans, MacNeills and MacLeods. The MacDonald camp was led by John's son, Angus Og. Probably in 1481 the two sides met in their galleys off the coast of Mull near Tobermory in the great sea battle, Bloody Bay. Angus Og had among his MacDonald supporters the Clan Ranald fleet and their side heavily defeated John and his non-MacDonald followers. Later in 1491 the Clan Ranald took part in Alexander of Lochalish's harrying of Ross. It is to be assumed that the Clan Ranald hostility to John, Lord of the Isles, seen in the sea battle of Bloody Bay, continued and led the Clan Ranald leaders to support the deposition of John as Ri Innse Gall and his replacement by John Mor MacDonald of Dunivaig.

In the years following the 1493 forfeiture, the chiefs of Clan Ranald were able to maintain their independence and hold their properties, often occupying these lands by force of arms without benefit of feudal charter. Holding lands "by the sword" is a common phrase in studies of Highland history, but its significance is generally overlooked. In holding its lands "by the sword" a kindred was struggling against the dictates of the Lowland government by forcefully maintaining the position of its recognised chiefs; in other words, by maintaining the local status quo. Conflicts (such as those involving the Clan Ranald) often arose when the Lowland government ignored the actual situation in the Uists and "gave" lands to outsiders such as the MacDonalds of Sleat, or as they were then called, the "Clan Huistein", but the inhabitants of Uist did not recognise these feudal charters; they continued to recognise the chiefs of the Clan Ranald as their kin-based leaders and saw

the leaders of the Clan Huistein as outsiders. In a situation such as this strife was inevitable. When the Clan Ranald held its lands by force against feudal claims, it is certain that the support of the people in the disputed territories was instrumental. Without their local support the struggle of the leaders of the Clan Ranald would have been hopeless. These people, often quite poorly documented in these early periods, have left clear testimony. The frequent success of kindreds such as the Clan Ranald, the Camerons, the MacDonalds of Keppoch and, indeed, the Clan Huistein itself, in a later period and another context, in maintaining their kindred's hereditary leaders and lands "by the sword" against Lowland dictates is strong evidence of these people's feelings. They did care about their kin-based leadership and they supported these traditional chiefs with a high degree of success against outside encroachment time after time.

It should not be assumed that because the king forfeited the Lordship and because the Clan Ranald supported that Lordship in most of the following risings that the Clan Ranald was always out of royal favour. Indeed, in 1506 Ranald Bane MacAllan, Chief of Clan Ranald, was held in high regard at court and was thus able to successfully settle his territorial dispute with the Clan Huistein. At this time Ranald gained feudal titles to the disputed lands.<sup>21</sup>

In 1513 Ranald Bane MacAllan was succeeded by his son Dugall MacRanald. This chief of Clan Ranald is remembered for two major reasons. Firstly, in a bond of warrant of 25th May 1520 he signed

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21. Ibid., pp.102 & 165. Interestingly, later when the fortunes of the Clan Huistein ebbed, it found itself without feudal charter to its own lands in Skye and was forced to use the same warlike tactics to hold these clan territories (although not against the Clan Ranald). . Ibid., p.107.



with his own hand "Dugal MacRynald of Ellantyrin".<sup>22</sup> It has been pointed out that this ability to write at this early period is noteworthy among island chiefs, especially since none of the seventeen clan leaders (including John Moydartach, a later Clan Ranald chief) could write at the Council of the Isles twenty-five years later.<sup>23</sup> This conclusion, that of the MacDonald authors of Clan Donald, is not at variance with the facts, but it is somewhat strange coming from Gaels. It can, and should, be pointed out that while most of these 16th century chiefs were illiterate in English, that was not their language. By Gaelic standards many of these individuals were certainly not illiterate; indeed, there is evidence indicating that at this period members of the Highland nobility frequently attended bardic schools, and the ability to appreciate, let alone compose, bardic verse seems to have required a period of formal training.<sup>24</sup> It is also certain that there was a substantial learned class of Gaelic scribes, bards and churchmen who were not only literate, but also competent in a variety of foreign languages, such as English and Scots. In 1532 seven members of the community of Iona witnessed a charter and only one was unable to sign his name<sup>25</sup> and of the eight native candidates for the Bishopric of the Isles and commendatorship of Iona before 1560, seven were university graduates in arts and the eighth an individual of proven talents.<sup>26</sup> This man, Ruairi MacAl-laster MacDonald, was extremely influential. He was one of the

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22. Angus and Archibald MacDonald, The Clan Donald, Vol. II, (Inverness: The Northern Counties Publishing Company Ltd., 1896), p.249.

23. Ibid.

24. Bannerman, Lordship, op.cit., p.236.

25. Ibid., p.229.

26. Ibid., p.231.

commissioners to Henry VIII in 1545 and he was certainly literate. He is responsible for much of that important period's surviving documentation and he was also the brother to John Moydartach, Chief of Clan Ranald.

Dugall MacRanald's second claim to notoriety is less positive, but of importance to the comprehension of traditional Gaelic society. Dugall appears to have behaved with such viciousness that he made himself detested by his clan. In one manuscript he is described as "a jealous and bad-tempered man who put to death his two brothers, John and Allan, and was afterwards himself killed".<sup>27</sup>

Dugall was deposed by the Clan Ranald and replaced by his uncle, Alexander MacAllan. Moreover, a Bond of Manrent, dated 20th February 1519, between Alexander, Dugall's replacement, and Sir John Campbell of Cawdor, names Alexander as "Captaine off the Clan-ranald" while "his eyme Doygall M'Rannald" was still alive.<sup>28</sup> This gives rise to the interesting possibility that Dugall was first deposed and only later, in uncertain circumstances, killed.

This interpretation appears to be justified by documentary evidence and it lends more significance to this situation; to depose a leader by killing him, even with general agreement, is one thing, but to take the more complicated procedure of raising the issue, coming to a popular agreement and then to depose a powerful man without assassinating him implies something even more important. Moreover, this interpretation also indicates that there existed some sort of machinery or institutional means for dealing with such

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27. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, p.249. (From "a Clanranald MS of last Century".)

28. Ibid., Vol. II, pp.252-253.

problems. The 1519 Bond of Manrent also seems to show that Sir John Campbell of Cawdor was fully aware of this state of affairs, that he accepted Alexander's title and Dugall's lack of a title and that Alexander MacAllan was considering Cawdor's advice on all problems "and speciale anent his [alive] eyne, Doygall M'Rannald".

Those who belittle the Gaelic culture because of an assumed "slavish obedience" given by clan members to "despotic" chiefs would do well to remember this event and those closely following. That Dugall MacRanald was despotic and cruel is beyond doubt. Gaelic culture was all too capable of spawning cruelty. But there was another side to the culture when it was working within its proper traditional bounds. Dugall was removed by his own clan and in some unexplained manner replaced by a man and family who enjoyed the full support of the Clan Ranald. This kindred supported its newly chosen line against Dugall and even, at a later date, went to war to retain their chosen line of leaders against another unacceptable claimant.

There are clues concerning the manner of Dugall's deposition. Around 1567 George Buchanan wrote: "The Scoti prisci to the present time elect their chiefs of clans and having elected them, associate with them a council of elders."<sup>29</sup> On the same topic Buchanan goes on to say:

Those of us Scots who retain our time honoured practice to this day, elect the chief of our clan and associate with him a council of wise men - and the chief is liable to lose his office if he does not obey this council. 30

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29. George Buchanan, De Iure Regni Apud Scotos, (Edinburgh, 1579), p.65.

30. H.R. Trevor-Roper, "George Buchanan and the Ancient Scottish Constitution", English Historical Review Supplement: 3, 1966, p.42.



Buchanan continues to use the example of accepted custom in traditional Gaeldom in his discussion of the Scottish kingship. Its value here is that it shows there was an "ancient custom of the men of the Isles" still observed in the mid 16th century, whereby the council of a clan was expected "to correct the enormities" of its chief. Buchanan continues:

... which ancient custom the men of the Isles and others in choosing their chiefs yet still observe. And since ever the regiment of a king was admitted within the Realm, the nobility has understood that it appertained to them to correct the enormities of their princes [chiefs], and all kings have acknowledged the same except when tyranny maintained them. 31

This evidence of a traditional council of elders within the clan and of some unexplained but real institutional procedure for replacing a poor chief at once supports and (quite possibly) explains the contention that Dugall MacRanald was deposed first and later killed and also helps to explain the method of its implementation. It should also be remembered that the Lordship of the Isles, like its member kindreds, had a council<sup>32</sup> and that the agreement of this "Council of the Isles" must have been a factor in this 1494 deposition of John, Lord of the Isles.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, John, Lord of the Isles, was certainly deposed without being put to death.<sup>34</sup>

And whether the Clan Ranald deposed Dugall by simply killing him, or by the more likely and more complicated procedure of a bloodless deposition, it is certain that this kindred asserted its will, selected another chief from a known and proven family and later went to war to support that chosen chief's son against still another

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31. Ibid.

32. See above, pp.17-18.

33. Bannerman, Lordship, op.cit., p.236.

34. Ranald Nicholson, Scotland: The Later Middle Ages, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1974), p.542.

unpopular candidate for the chiefship. These are the actions of a strongwilled, informed and independent minded people; a people who believed in their Gaelic society and in the propriety of a headman in that society but a people who also believed in the obvious logic of replacing a defective part and not in mindless, self-destructive servitude.

Despite the turmoil surrounding his elevation to the chiefship, Alexander MacAllan's tenure as leader of the Clan Ranald seems to have been relatively quiet. He died sometime before 1530 and was replaced by his son John Moydartach who enjoyed the loyal support of the Clan Ranald through a period of great strife. Despite his illegitimate birth, John succeeded in gaining charters to the whole estate of Clan Ranald and occupied these lands until his royal kidnapping in the summer of 1540. In May of that year James V left Leith and proceeded to the Hebrides in a well-armed and strongly manned flotilla of twelve ships. This royal progress had been precipitated by the unsuccessful but potentially dangerous rising in support of the Lordship of the Isles by Donald Gorm MacDonald of Sleat the previous year. Despite its unexpected and lucky (from the government's point of view) early conclusion with Donald Gorm's death, James realised that it had held a serious potential since most of the leaders of the old Lordship clans seemed ready to join and so he resolved to move against these dangerous Gaels. With this powerful naval force James moved through the Hebrides seizing those influential individuals piecemeal under pretext of meetings. By the end of this voyage James had netted a large haul of chiefs including not only John Moydartach but also Alexander MacRanald of Glengarry, Donald MacKay of Strathnaver, Ruairi MacLeod of Lewis, Alexander



MacLeod of Dunvegan, John MacKenzie of Kintail, Hector MacLean of Duart and James MacDonald of Islay.<sup>35</sup>

During the imprisonment of John Moydartach, outsiders took advantage of the leaderless condition of the Clan Ranald to impose Ranald Gallda or "Ranald, the stranger", as their chief. Again, the people of Clan Ranald found themselves under an unpopular chief, but this chief enjoyed strong outside support. Ranald's supporters were his mother's Fraser kinsmen led by their chief, Hugh Fraser, Lord Lovat, and George, the 4th Earl of Huntly; Ranald was also backed by feudal charters (John Moydartach's having been revoked). Little is known about Ranald Gallda except that he was the younger half-brother of Alexander MacAllan, John's father, and that he had been raised among his mother's kindred, the Frasers. It is clear that this new "chief" was unpopular, his manners and accent, learned among the Frasers, seemed odd to the people of Clan Ranald (hence his title "the stranger"), his disposition was described as being "parsimonious" by clan bards<sup>36</sup> and, equally important, he was far removed from any right to the chiefship.<sup>37</sup> For a year or two Ranald Gallda, backed by the strength of Lovat, Huntly and the king's feudal charter, held his position, but the 1542 release of John Moydartach inclined Ranald to quit Moidart and visit his friend and kinsman Lovat.

Immediately on his return John Moydartach was joined by the entire Clan Ranald, including Allan MacDugail of Morar, son of the previously deposed Dugall MacRanald,<sup>38</sup> and resolved to move against

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35. Gregory, op.cit., pp.147-148.

36. Ibid., p.158, and MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, p.261.

37. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, pp.259-60. True, Ranald Gallda was well within the derbfine of Clan Ranald leadership, but he had never been elected by the kindred and the popular John Moydartach had certainly not been deposed by his clan.

38. Ibid., p.262.

the Frasers before Lovat could act. Under John's leadership the Clan Ranald, with the assistance of Alexander MacDonnell of Gengarry, Ranald Glas MacDonnell of Keppoch, Ewin MacAllan Cameron of Lochail, Chief of Clan Cameron, and Alexander MacDonald, Chief of the MacIans of Ardnamurchan, invaded the lands of Lovat and his neighbours.<sup>39</sup> This west Highland force occupied the Fraser districts of Abertarff and Stratherrick and also the Grant territories of Urquhart and Glenmoriston. After a lengthy occupation they were forced to retire to the safety of their western mountains before the superior force of Lovat, the Chief of Grant and Huntly. Seeing that the invaders chose not to confront his large force and that they had seemingly returned to their own western lands, Huntly turned back, thinking his job finished. In the Great Glen his force split, Lord Lovat and his Frasers taking the quicker southern route home along the south shore of Loch Lochy.

Unfortunately for Lovat, the Clan Ranald and its allies had not retreated and disbanded, but had remained intact and had quietly stalked their numerous enemy. As soon as Lovat's force, now somewhat smaller than that of John Moydartach's, was beyond the help of Huntly, the Clan Ranald and its allies attacked. The resultant battle, Blar na Leine, 1544, was a hard fought but clear victory for the clans of the west and a disaster for the Clan Fraser. None of the Clan Ranald leaders nor the chiefs of their allies was slain, but Lord Lovat, his three brothers, his son and Ranald Gallda were among the many Fraser gentlemen killed.<sup>40</sup> It is incorrect to present this battle or, indeed, this entire train of events as an inexplicable

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39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., p.269.

clan feud or as a huge profit seeking cattle raid. While potential profit may have been a secondary motive, it is clear that this battle is best seen as the successful conclusion of the Clan Ranald's long struggle to maintain the line of chiefs of its own choice. Dugall MacRanald had been the first victim of the Clan Ranald belief in its right to select a popular chief and Ranald Gallda (with his Fraser kin) was the second.

When word of this battle reached Huntly, he was "sair grieved" and again moved to punish the western clans. At the head of a large force he "spulyeit and herreit" the lands of the MacDonnells of Keppoch and the Camerons of Locheil, hanging the few noteworthy enemies that fell into his hands.<sup>41</sup> It can also be assumed from following events and from the geographical situation that Glengarry's easily accessible lands felt the heavy hand of Huntly. But, again, he failed to strike as far west as Moidart and Castle Tioram and in this stronghold of his, John Moydartach, his Clan Ranald daoine-uaisle and their Cameron and MacDonald allies rested in safety.<sup>42</sup> The only result of Huntly's action was that it provoked the injured MacDonnells of Keppoch, the MacDonnells of Glengarry and Camerons of Locheil to retaliation. It seems that after Blar na Leine John Moydartach and his Clan Ranald took no part in these fresh raids. This inactivity on the part of the Clan Ranald is interesting. It strengthens the contention that the kindred's major object in the Blar na Leine campaign had been to support its chosen line of chiefs and not profit. Since Huntly had not been so bold, or unwise, as to try to spoil Clan Ranald's "rough bounds", the Clan Ranald, its chief

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41. Ibid., p.270.

42. Ibid., p.168.



secure and its territories untouched, did not share the desire of its injured allies for a quest of revenge. Here the words of Donald Gregory come to mind.

Such was the famous clan battle of Blar-na-leine, or Kinloch-lochy, by which the Clanranald maintained in possession of the chiefship and estates of their tribe an individual of their own choice, in opposition to one supported by all the influence of the feudal law. It is not unworthy of notice that John Moydartach, himself an elected chief, afterwards transmitted to his descendants, without difficulty, the possessions that had been so hardly won. 43

And, finally, the late 18th century song, "Taladh Iain Mhuideartaich" or "John Moidart's Lullaby", composed by John MacCodrum (d.1779) to celebrate the birth of the heir to the Clan Ranald estates is of interest. MacCodrum sang to the infant John Moydartach:

Do you remember the day of the battle of Leny?  
- the Frasers were in extremity, not one in a  
hundred of them escaped, and you have retained  
your possessions until this day. 44

Clearly, in the late 18th century, before Donald Gregory had contended that the Blar na Leine campaign had been fought to maintain "in possession of the chiefship and estates of their tribe an individual of their own choice", MacCodrum was assuring the future Clanranald that by their 1544 victory his ancestors had "retained your possessions".

The motives of the clans allied with the Clan Ranald throughout this period are too often overlooked or explained away in simplistic terms. Were they merely interested in booty? This is not likely and the contention of the authors of Clan Donald that

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43. Gregory, op.cit., pp.162-163.

44. William Matheson, ed. The Songs of John MacCodrum, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1938), pp.120-21.



Alexander MacDonald, the Chief of the MacIans of Ardnamurchan, was "eager to engage in any conflict that might cause annoyance to the Government" is singularly unconvincing. It is significant that every clan that came to the aid of the Clan Ranald had been a member of the Lordship of the Isles and more especially, with the Clan Ranald, they were the major land-based members of that confederation; consequently, they were likely to share both the Clan Ranald's traditional approach to matters such as the selection of a chief and, as conservative mainland-based kindreds, they were also likely to suffer, as the Clan Ranald had, from similar outside feudal interference. It is reasonable to assume that, in supporting the traditional point of view represented by the Clan Ranald, they were also attempting to buttress their own conservative development. In disregarding, or shrugging off as mere greed, the motives of these allied kindreds, one interesting piece of evidence has been overlooked. The MacIans of Ardnamurchan, whose geographic base was as inaccessible as the Clan Ranald's to Huntly, also escaped his wrath and, like the Clan Ranald, the MacIans seem to have remained inactive during the reprisals carried out by the injured clans of Locheil, Glengarry and Keppoch.<sup>45</sup> This MacIan inactivity supports the suggestion that the predominant object of Clan Ranald's allies had been to uphold John Moydartach's conservative kin-based position and that once he was secure, further action was unnecessary, except to those clans who had been unlucky enough to feel Huntly's "justice".

Here it should also be remembered that the support of these clans represented much more than mere support by John Moydartach's

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45. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, p.271.

cronies, his fellow chiefs. Given the evidence for a contemporary council of elders in each clan, the example of the Clan Ranald deposing the unpopular Dugall MacRanald and defeating the equally unpopular Ranald Gallda, the fact that the members of the Council of the Isles had deposed the unsatisfactory John, Lord of the Isles, and the fact that around 1500 the MacDonnells of Keppoch had also deposed their chief John Alluinn MacDonnell and selected Donald Glas MacDonnell to replace him,<sup>46</sup> a conclusion based on much more than the simple desires of a few individual chiefs is required. Given this evidence indicating a certain amount of popular control over Gaelic leaders by their followers, the traditional stand of their chiefs must be seen as popular with a great majority of their people. This conclusion should not be overstated; these chiefs did exercise great power, but in this period it was quite obviously not unlimited.

The fact that Huntly had felt confident enough to strike into the heart of Lochail's and Keppoch's country and yet felt reluctant to venture into the far western bounds of the Clan Ranald is significant, especially since the Clan Ranald had instigated the crisis and since Lochail and Keppoch had merely been allies of John Moydartach. The Clan Ranald was no more traditional or dangerous than its relations in Keppoch or Glengarry or its neighbours the Clan Cameron, but it happened to occupy a territory that was, by the standards of the time, far removed and distant. To strike at the Clan Ranald from the ground an enemy had first to fight its way through the Camerons and the other tribes of MacDonalds and Mac-

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46. Ibid., pp.612-13 and Gregory, op.cit., pp.108-09.

Donnells and thus, even before it encountered the potent Clan Ranald, it found itself far from home, supplies and reinforcements and deep in a strange and hostile country. This remoteness was to help the Clan Ranald in its struggle (already joined) to preserve the traditional aspects and attitudes of the Gaelic culture against external pressure.

In 1545, the year following Blar na Leine, John Moydartach was active as a major leader in the service of Donald Dubh, the heir to the title, Lord of the Isles, who had recently escaped his life-long confinement among the Campbells. Despite this life of imprisonment and government attempts to stigmatise him as a bastard, the Hebridean chiefs flocked to his standard, or rather, gathered under their shared Gaelic standard. The devotion paid to this rightful heir to the Lordship by the island chiefs is noteworthy and the Captain of Clan Ranald's service was beyond even that norm. With a large Clan Ranald contingent John Moydartach accompanied the Highland army of four thousand men and one hundred and sixty galleys to Knockfergus in Ireland where a Council of the Isles was held on 28th July 1545. These Lordship troops were described in despatches by the Irish Privy Council to the English king as being

three thousand of them very tall men, clothed, for the most part, in habergeons of mail, armed with long swords and long bows, but with few guns; the other thousand, tall maryners, that rowed in the galleys. 47

Donald Dubh had left an equal number of four thousand men mobilised in Scotland to hold the forces of Huntly and Argyle in check.<sup>48</sup> At this meeting Donald Dubh's two principle counsellors were John,

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47. Gregory, op.cit., p.171.

48. Ibid.

the Captain of Clan Ranald, and Hector MacLean of Duart.<sup>49</sup> This council selected and sent envoys to London with letters from Donald Dubh, Lord of the Isles, to the English king and his Privy Council. These representatives were Ruairi MacAllaster MacDonald, Dean of Morven and brother to John Moydartach, and Patrick MacLean, Justiciar of the Isles and Baillie of Icolmkill, brother to MacLean of Duart. As well as his chieftain brother, Ruairi MacAllaster played a significant role in this period. He had fought at the Battle of Blar na Leine<sup>50</sup> and after the battle was elected to the Deanery of Morvern by the Islesmen.<sup>51</sup>

While it appears to be true that none of the Island chiefs could write English at this time, it is well to remember that Ruairi was well educated by both Highland and Lowland standards and, to a large extent, he is responsible for the surviving documentation from the period.<sup>52</sup>

While the major motive of this rising was the restoration of the Lordship, one of its short term objectives was English money. In the "Book of Clan Ranald" MacMhuirich said:

A ship came from England with a supply of money to carry on the war, which landed at Mull; and the money was given to Maclean of Dowart to be distributed among the commanders of the army; which they not receiving in proportion as it should have been distributed amongst them, caused the army to disperse. 53

To this secondary economic motive must be added the "deep-rooted

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49. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, pp.271-72.

50. Ibid.

51. Bannerman, Lordship, op.cit., p.231.

52. See above, pp.24-25.

53. Alexander Cameron, ed. Reliquiae Celticae, Vol. II, ("Book of Clan Ranald"), (Inverness: Northern Chronicle Office, 1882), p.167.



hostility to the house of Argyle".<sup>54</sup> The Argyllshire Clan Campbell, rising to great power in the place of Somerled's old Ri Airir Godel or "King of Argyll", had originally followed the lead of the Lordship, but throughout the 15th century it slowly moved towards a more independent line. By 1545 the Campbell leadership had demonstrated to the members of the Lordship and to the government that it intended to extend its influence into the Isles at the expense of the native clans.<sup>55</sup> Despite the validity of these two factors, there is no doubt that the overriding motive of the Islesmen was to restore Donald Dubh to his rightful position, Lord of the Isles.

This attempt to restore the Lordship, "easily the most formidable of all",<sup>56</sup> provides an excellent example of the potential for unity that existed in the Highlands. The rising, more than fifty years after the government had forfeited the Lordship, was impressive in the almost total support it received from the old Lordship clans. But this unity was structurally based around the native Gaelic institution of the Lordship and not the external and imposed feudalism. With the death of Donald Dubh, the last generally accepted candidate to that title, the structure collapsed.

In 1545, after Donald's death, John Moydartach brought his forces back to Scotland where he found himself very much out of royal favour, thanks to his part in the sanguinary battle of Blar na Leine and his close support of Donald Dubh. He was ordered to appear before Parliament to answer charges of treason and his lands were again taken away from him - on paper. On the ground, supported by his kindred, the Captain of Clan Ranald held fast. He did not go

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54. Gregory, op.cit., p.172.

55. Steer and Bannerman, op.cit., pp.211-12.

56. Ibid., p.213.

to Edinburgh and he did not surrender his lands. Not only did the Clan Ranald face governmental opposition, but Huntly combined with the Mackintosh Chief of Clan Chattan, MacKenzie of Kintail, Ross of Balnagown, the Earl of Sutherland, the Earl of Atholl, the new Lord Lovat, Grant of Freuchie and Munro of Fowlis in two pacts against John Moydartach and his kindred.<sup>57</sup> Despite this formidable array of enemies, John held his position and while the documentation regarding lesser clan members is scarce in this period, it is certain from surrounding events that the Captain of Clan Ranald enjoyed the support of his kindred in his stand, and on that support rested his real strength. He could have survived without a loyal clan no more than it could have prospered under a poor leader. There was another reason for John's strength. In his difficulties with Lovat, John had enjoyed the support of his neighbours, the Camerons of Lochell, the MacDonnells of Keppoch, the MacDonnells of Glengarry and the MacIans of Ardnamurchan. When his brother, Ruairi MacAllaster, opposed the Regent's choice for the Deanery of Morvern, again this leading Clan Ranald family had enjoyed the support of its Gaelic neighbours. As has been seen, this important area support seems to originate out of a common conservative outlook that existed among these west Highland kindreds and here it is possible to see the vague outlines of a developing community of traditional Gaelic interest awkwardly rising to replace (in a less formal and much less satisfactory manner) the fallen Lordship.

In the following years John Moydartach was often out of royal favour. Several times his titles were revoked, and he survived

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57. William Fraser, The Chiefs of Grant, Vol. I, (Edinburgh: William Fraser, LL.D., 1883), pp.116-17.

assaults mounted by Huntly, Argyll and Atholl who had been ordered to proceed to the "utter extermination" of the Clan Ranald as well as the MacDonalds of Sleat and the MacLeods of Lewis. Atholl and Argyll failed and for the third time in ten years the remoteness of the Clan Ranald's mainland base had frustrated Huntly's efforts. It should also be added that had Huntly ever succeeded in taking Castle Tioram, he would have found that Clan Ranald's distant Benbecula presented even more complex problems. Eventually, after the failure of these feudal lieutenants, John was given a promise of safe conduct to visit Queen Mary of Guise. Whereupon he abandoned his long policy of caution and travelled to court where he was cordially greeted and then imprisoned.

Twice John Moydartach had accepted the solemn word of his sovereign and twice he had been deprived of his freedom. The Lowland government did not seem to regard its Gaelic subjects as worthy of decent and honest treatment. In retrospect, seeing the utter failure of other Highland policies, it is a pity that such a policy was never tested. True, Highlanders and Islesmen were never ideal subjects, but perhaps such treatment helps explain these Gaelic shortcomings. In this context the 1545 words of the Island envoys to Henry VIII's Irish Council should be remembered. These commissioners (one of them John Moydartach's brother, Ruairi MacAllaster) claimed that the inhabitants of the

"Wyld Ilis" of Scotland could be trusted by England having "always been enemies to the realm of Scotland, who, when we were at peace with the king, hangit, hedit, presoned, and destroyed many of our kyn, freindis and forbears". 58

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58. Papers during the Reign of Henry VIII, pp.134-35, no.294.



Given the background and, indeed, future developments, it is not possible to shrug off these words as mere diplomatic jargon.

After a short period, however, John Moydartach and his followers escaped. Once safe in their native west John and his kinsmen chose not to accept invitations to attend the Inverness Judicial Courts that Mary held in 1556. The government had seemingly exhausted its available weaponry against the Clan Ranald with one exception, the feudal charter. There followed a barrage of charters "giving" Clan Ranald land to individuals such as Allan, the son of Ranald Gallda,<sup>59</sup> but it was one thing to receive charters to Eigg and Arisaig in safe Edinburgh and quite another to occupy and enjoy these lands in the west Highlands. The effect of these charters may be judged from a question recorded in the 1566 Acts of Parliament, "be quhat means may all Scotland be brocht to universal obedience and how may Johne Moydart and McKy be dantonit";<sup>60</sup> significantly, no answer is included. The government's difficult position is clear: its feudal lieutenants, Huntly, Argyll and Atholl had all failed in military campaigns, both by land and sea, against the Clan Ranald; the government's feudal charters had been shown useless in the Gaelic west; John Moydartach was highly unlikely to be coaxed from his secure west Highland base a third time and, in any case, the Reformation was diverting Lowland attention from Highland matters.

With the 1584 death of John Moydartach the chain that led from the Lordship of the Isles through Donald Dubh was ended.

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59. D. Hay Fleming, ed. and James Beveridge, ed. The Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland 1556-1567, Vol. V, part I, (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1936), p.322, No.1212.
60. The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland, 1567-1592, (Edinburgh: printed by the command of His Majesty, King George the Third, 1814), p.44.



Gaelic culture had taken a serious step in its slow deterioration, and while that culture was still firmly established, it had changed and would never regain the variety, vitality and direction of the Lordship days. The decline was to be both political and cultural. The 1493 forfeiture had not been quickly felt in the west Highlands and Isles, a governmental decree issued in distant Edinburgh could not change the conservative attitudes of the people of the west over-night and no substantial military steps were undertaken by the Lowland establishment to alter the area's political reality, but after the 1545 rising in support of Donald Dubh no further such unified actions on the part of the member kindreds occurred. The political fragmentation that had been implicit in the forfeiture finally began to be real. The considerable amount of time that passed before the break-up became obvious and the seven major risings that occurred before the men of the Lordship accepted the forfeiture can be seen as a tribute to its strength, to the devotion the inhabitants of the Lordship (both MacDonald and non-MacDonald) paid to their political structure and the traditional culture it protected. But as the generation of John Moydartach, Captain of Clan Ranald, and his brother Ruairi MacAllaster, Dean of Morvern and Bishop Elect of the Isles, slowly gave way to the next, the effects of the forfeiture became all too obvious.

The loss of the Lord's Council of the Isles as an accepted place to deliberate and resolve problems was serious. This is seen in the escalation of internal violence. The feud, always a part of the Gaelic culture, became much more significant. It is possible, indeed, it appears necessary, to interpret much of the conflict in the west Highlands and Islands in the fifty or so years

following the 1493 forfeiture, such as the seven risings and the Blar na Leine episode, as a unified people struggling to conserve their traditional culture and political situation in the face of external pressure. It is less often possible so to interpret the increasing strife of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Lacking the consolidating presence of an accepted Lord (and the institutional structure inherent in that situation), the Lordship area became an arena containing a large number of unbalanced, unstructured, warlike and contesting kindreds. Furthermore, as the breakdown of the old structure became evident, these clans turned ever more inwards, the significant artistic side of the culture increasingly giving way to military demands. No longer was the majority of the area's conflict with the external forces of the crown's lieutenants such as Huntly, Argyll, Atholl, Lovat and Kintail. The following sketch of Clan Ranald history will show the enemy more often becoming member kindreds of the old Lordship such as the MacLeods, MacLeans, MacNeills, Camerons and even other MacDonalds.

The times of turbulence that were enveloping the post-Lordship world have left their mark on the folk of the area. To this day this era is known as Linn nan Creach, or "Age of Forays". In this period the Clan Ranald became embroiled in a costly feud with the MacLeods of Dunvegan that led to the suffocation of every man, woman and child of Clan Ranald's Isle of Eigg as they hid in a cave from the more numerous MacLeod raiders. One of the victims was Angus MacIain, a son of John Moydartach.<sup>61</sup> Later, this provoked

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61. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, p.294 and The New Statistical Account of Scotland, Vol. XIV, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1835), p.146.

Clan Ranald retaliation in the form of a great attack on the Isle of Skye.<sup>62</sup> The raids and counter-raids continued for over a generation. This period saw much other strife in the form of feuds with the MacLeans, MacKenzies of Kintail and MacNeills of Barra.<sup>63</sup>

This turbulence was all too general throughout the Highlands and Islands and the Lowland establishment singled out the most prominent and obnoxious of the Highland "rebels" for attention. Three major Gaelic areas were selected for eventual colonisation by acceptable and rent paying Lowlanders; unfortunately for all, people already lived in these areas. The Isle of Lewis, Trotternish in Skye and the lands of Harris, Dunvegan and Glenelg were all marked for this treatment, but Lewis received the first attention. This island was the home of the Siol Torquil branch of the Clan MacLeod and the Lowland settlers were almost continually at war with its leaders, Neill and Murdoch MacLeod, the sons of Ruairi MacLeod, the last Lord of Lewis. Behind this native Lewis hostility was a powerful party of interested Gaelic locals. The MacLeods of Harris and the MacDonalds of Skye, whose lands were to be next if the Lewis colonists succeeded, and MacKenzie of Kintail, who had designs of his own on Lewis, were all working against the settlers. It is interesting to note that the Siol Torquil received aid not only from these self-interested kindreds, but also from the Clan Ranald and the MacNeills of Barra,<sup>64</sup> despite their own mutual enmity and the fact that neither's lands were in immediate danger of forfeit. The fact that these

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62. MacDonald, op.cit., Vol. II, pp.294-95.

63. Annie I. Cameron, Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603, Vol. XI, 1593-1595, (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1936), pp.661,667 and 668, and Gregory, op.cit., p.234.

64. Acts of Parliament, op.cit., IV, pp.278-81.



unthreatened kindreds joined in this active support of the hard-pressed Siol Torquil indicates that something of a conservative island community of interest may have been in operation. It is reasonable for all these islanders to have seen any implantation of an alien culture in their midst as quite serious. It was one thing for the Clan Ranald to press its narrow interests against the MacLeods or MacNeills; it was quite another to see a neighbouring kindred deprived of its ancient lands by outsiders seeking to introduce a foreign culture and influence into the area.

After two attempts to "plant themeselffis thairin be force"<sup>65</sup> the Lowland colonists found local hostility too strong and gave up. The weakened Siol Torquil, successful against outsiders and the government, was eventually to fail when MacKenzie of Kintail acquired legal title to Lewis and launched a successful invasion of the MacLeod bastion with his own clansmen.

Despite the failure of its colonisation scheme, central government was not ready to capitulate. In the following years several other methods of dealing with Scotland's Gaels were considered and these projects give useful insights into the attitudes of those in authority. One plan in 1607 envisioned George, the 6th Earl and 1st Marquis of Huntly as the Commissioner of the Northern Isles. This scheme called for Huntly to undertake, with his private means alone, to reduce all the northern islands except Skye and Lewis and that within one year he was to end the service, not by agreement with the local people, but by "extirpating" them. The Marquis accepted most of the conditions, promised to proceed by the "extirpation of

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65. Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, A.D. 1587-1603, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1927), p.221.



the barbarous people of the Isles", but fell out with the governmental sponsors of the plan over financial details. He felt the rents due on "his" islands after their conquest should be much less than did the Privy Council. It is also clear that since the Marquis was an influential catholic, the protestant establishment in Edinburgh was loath to add all the northern isles to the vast areas already under his control. In fact, the Council went so far as to order the catholic magnate to confine himself within an eighteen mile circumference of Elgin and he was commanded to hear presbyterian sermons in the hope that a converted Huntly could implement the plan. This religious issue, typical of the age, appears to have been the plan's real stumbling block, and Donald Gregory says that it

seems alone to have prevented the reign of James VI from being stained by a massacre which, for atrocity and the deliberation with which it was planned, would have left that of Glencoe far in the shade. 66

Gregory's moral verdict is understandable but, along with the religious problem, there would have been one further factor to hinder the scheme's success. The involved clans, including the Clan Ranald, would have been, like the Siol Torquill of Lewis, disinclined to allow themselves to be "extirpated" and it is difficult to imagine all these remote, potent and warlike kindreds falling to Huntly's private means. Unlike the unfortunate people of Glencoe, these islanders were not trapped, unarmed or under any illusion about the government's intentions and policy. Even with governmental aid, previous Earls of Huntly had conspicuously failed in much less ambitious undertakings and it is equally difficult to picture Huntly's troublesome feudal vassals such as the Clan Chattan, the Clan Cameron

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66. Gregory, op.cit., p.315.

and the MacDonnells of Keppoch abandoning their own differences either among themselves or with Huntly, their feudal overlord, and relishing the destruction of members of their own culture and often their own kinsmen. Practicalities aside, the scheme's many shortcomings should not be allowed to detract from its shocking object.

In 1608 Andrew Stewart, Lord Ochiltree and Lieutenant of the Isles, proceeded to the western islands accompanied by Andrew Knox, the Bishop of the Isles, in a formidable fleet. At Aros in Mull, he held court attended by Donald MacAllan, Captain of the Clan Ranald, as well as the chiefs of the MacLeans of Duart, MacDonalds of Dunivaig, MacDonalds of Sleat, MacLeods of Harris and others. Angus MacDonald of Dunivaig, after promising his future obedience, was allowed to depart and the others were invited to hear a sermon by the Bishop of the Isles on board Ochiltree's ship, the Moon. Ruairi MacLeod of Harris was the only one of these island chiefs who appears to have learned history's lessons. He suspected foul play and declined to board the vessel; the rest soon found themselves prisoners in Lowland castles. After a short period of confinement these chiefs, including the Clan Ranald's Donald MacAllan, gained their freedom by offering petitions pledging their good conduct and promising to appear and assist the Bishop at the forthcoming meeting on Iona.

One of Ochiltree's primary objectives had been to break up the war galleys of the islesmen. He displayed much wisdom by refusing to carry out his orders without first receiving permission to do the same with the vessels of the mainland west coast kindreds. He, justifiably, felt that the destruction of only the islanders' galleys would break the area's balance of power, do serious injustice to the

islesmen and invite the mainland kindreds to attack the deprived islanders and plunge the area into even greater strife. These powers were quickly granted and he appears to have destroyed many galleys in the areas he visited. When looking into the causes of the deterioration of traditional Gaelic culture, the loss of these galleys, so well suited to their environment and the people's needs, was doubtless significant in both a military and a purely functional sense.

The government is next seen active on Iona promoting, indeed, forcing a series of laws on the leaders of the Island clans. The Statutes of Iona are important when seen in conjunction with other official acts of this period in displaying the designs of government regarding the Highlands and Isles, but as a single set of codes their importance seems to have been overstressed. At Iona on 23rd August 1609, Bishop Knox met with and coerced a number of major island chiefs, including the Captain of Clan Ranald, into agreeing to a series of statutes designed to pacify the area.<sup>67</sup> Among other things, the laws provided for the protection and support of clergy of the "Reformit Kirk", the reduction of the number of retainers kept by any chief (Clanranald was limited to six), the curbing of "thair extraordinair drinking of strong wynis and acquavitie", the Lowland education of the sons of substantial men in the "Inglische" language, the reduction of "hagbutis", "pistolletis" and other firearms and the curtailment of "vagabounds" and "flattir" bards; moreover, "the principall of every clan man [was to] be answerable for the remanent of the samyn, his kyn, freindis, and dependairis".<sup>68</sup> These statutes

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67. Gordon Donaldson, ed. Scottish Historical Documents, (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1974), p.172.

68. Ibid., pp.172-75.



showed little immediate success; indeed, within five years the Isles were involved in the great Clan Donald rebellion. Nevertheless, when considered jointly with the other recent official actions, it must be noted that there had been some effect.

Gone were the days when a John Moydartach could stand safely in Castle Tioram in total defiance of the Lowland authorities. Changes were not coming quickly. Arisaig and Benbecula must still have seemed like the wilds of Afghanistan to the burgesses of Edinburgh, but the MacLeods of Lewis were gone. True, with local aid, they had defeated the Lowlanders, but then the Siol Torquil, weakened by its efforts, had fallen to the MacKenzies and their feudal charters. John Moydartach had been twice imprisoned but once back in his "rough bounds", he had been secure and had stood with his kindred in open defiance. However, after the capture of Donald MacAllan on the vessel Moon, and his eventual release, this Captain of Clan Ranald had not felt able to defy those in power. In this context it is well to remember that no nation's history operates in a vacuum and this is especially true of Scottish Highland History and Irish History. At Iona Donald MacAllan and his fellow Hebridean chiefs were not simply reacting to an altered Scottish situation. Their inclination to defy Lowland authorities, indeed, their very ability to defy, had been seriously impaired by the recent downfall of Ulster. In this altered tactical situation the Captain of Clan Ranald had, as instructed, dutifully turned up at Iona and signed where he was told to sign. And while it is unlikely that he ever bothered to keep his retainers below six or curtailed his drinking of "wynis and acquavitie", his mere attendance was evidence that the situation had, to a certain degree, changed. And it is equally true



that some form of change or control was needed in the area during this period of political and cultural flux. Brutal acts such as the mass murder of the entire population of Eigg were not just actions of a people defending their culture. These events serve to underline the serious deterioration that had taken place since the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles and, at the same time, demonstrate the lack of and need for some form of area political control. Having broken the Lordship the authorities in Edinburgh were justified in their belief that something needed to be done, but their reactions were slow, bigoted and their solutions often worse than the problems.

The Linn nan Creach was an era of damaging deterioration, a fall into a state of affairs where the Gaelic people occasionally resorted to, and suffered from, utter savagery. To deny, or to attempt to gloss over, this truth would render this study useless, but the Gaelic culture clearly had not always been like this and this state of affairs can be understood. Indeed, when that culture was functioning properly, within its own traditional bounds, it appears to have been more peaceful than the corresponding Lowland Scottish and English societies. Donald Monro's words of 1519 should be remembered. When speaking about the earlier Council of the Isles, he said:

thai sate everyane at thair Counsell ministring  
justice. In thair time thair was great peace  
and welth in the Isles throw the ministration  
of justice. 69

This earlier period must be seen as a significant contrast with the Linn nan Creach. True, "the age of forays" saw examples of terrible barbarity, but that age represents a crisis period. It must be

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69. Monro, op.cit., p.57.

remembered that the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles had eventually brought an end to the notable unity within the Lordship and ended a period of considerable internal peace. It is possible to understand the excesses of Linn nan Creach by seeing the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles, the destruction of the internal and traditional Gaelic political institution, as the basic cause of the period of confusion and bloodshed that followed. After depriving the Gaelic people of their central political organisation, the Lowland government had not stepped in with an alternative structure and, of course, had opposed the seven major attempts by the Islesmen to recreate the old order for themselves. Consequently, for a long period the various kindreds had been simply left adrift. The result was the violent Linn nan Creach; and when the government in Edinburgh finally moved to alter a situation that so needed alteration, it demonstrated its own moral and political bankruptcy by reacting with plans for the extirpation of the Island race. Later, when this proved impracticable (not because the plan seemed immoral but because of financial squabbles and because the man for the job was catholic), the Edinburgh establishment reacted in a similar vein but on a much smaller scale by setting clan against clan and with the implementation of a series of statutes that, in the words of a recent author, "represent the first of a long series of concerted attempts to deracinate the Gael through the deliberate and calculated erosion of his culture and language".<sup>70</sup>

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70. Edward J. Cowan, Montrose: for Covenant and King, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p.51.

Following close on the Iona assembly, Donald MacAllan, Captain of the Clan Ranald and "Allane Camroun McEanduy of Lochquhaber", Chief of the Clan Cameron, appeared before the Privy Council to renounce their mutual hostilities. The origins and details of this quarrel are uncertain, but were possibly over lands in Knoydart. The Register of the Privy Council says that the two

heartilieembracit ane anither and choppit hands  
togidder and promist to persew thair actions  
which wes the occasion of the present differ-  
ences betwix thome be the ordinary course of  
law and justice. 71

In 1613 the Clan Ranald again had problems with the MacNeills of Barra but this time Donald MacAllan, Captain of Clan Ranald, wisely used the authority of the Lowland establishment to have his nephew Neill MacNeill named as head of the MacNeill kindred.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, there is ample evidence that in 1615 Donald MacAllan was having problems with his own kin. Early in that year he reported three of "his awne brether[s]... Rannald McAllane [of Benbecula], Johnne McAllane [of Kinlochmoidart] and Rory McAllane" to the Privy Council as "disobedient and unanswerable persons"<sup>73</sup> and on 18th July he entered into a Bond of Indemnity with Donald MacAngus of Glengarry in which he promised not to molest or oppress the Glengarry kindred.<sup>74</sup> This indicates that certain of Donald MacAllan's followers, possibly his brothers, had been causing irritation with Glengarry.

In the same year the grim feud with the MacLeods was patched

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71. David Masson, ed. The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, 1607-1610, (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1887), p.760.

72. R.P.C., 1613-1616, op.cit., p.7.

73. Ibid., p.776.

74. Register of Deeds, Vol. 263, 18th July 1615.

up. On 24th August 1615 Clanranald was in Glasgow where he met with Sir Ruairi MacLeod of Dunvegan, Sir Lauchlan MacKinnon of Strathardle and Lauchlan MacLean of Coll. These chiefs all entered into a Bond of Friendship and the hostility that had led to the total waste of the people of Eigg was at an end.<sup>75</sup>

The early decades of the 17th century witnessed not only the end of the Clan Ranald-MacLeod feud but also the conclusion of several other conflicts between members of the conservative block of west Highland and Island kindreds. It is interesting to note that despite that period's many and serious internal conflicts, these traditional kindreds still tended to combine and pull together, in a loose and unstructured way, if one of their number was threatened by outsiders. During this period there is evidence that (close on the heels of the settlements of the Clan Ranald-Locheil feud, the Clan Ranald-Glengarry feud and the internal Clan Ranald squabbles) the Captain of Clan Ranald was active with the Chief of Glengarry in assisting the Cameron of Locheil at court and that all three of these clans aided the endangered MacGregors.

The MacGregors, perhaps the most famous early victims of Campbell expansion, had a long history of living on the edge of the law due to their landless condition. In 1603 the MacGregors had met and annihilated the Colquhouns in a fair clan battle, but due to their many past offences and their lack of friends at court, they had been proscribed by James VI. Consequently, in the early 17th century the Clan Gregor was outlawed and its members tracked down and killed throughout the Highlands by the king's feudal lieutenants

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75. MacLeod of MacLeod Papers, Box 2, Charters and Titles, (Dunvegan Castle, Isle of Skye), 24th August 1616.



and the MacGregor's hereditary enemies.

At court in 1609 Donald MacAllan of Clan Ranald and Angus of Glengarry energetically supported Allan MacConell Duie of Lochail, Chief of the Clan Cameron, whose feudal titles had fallen to Argyll and others.<sup>76</sup> The case dragged on for years and Clanranald, who knew James VI's intense feelings against the MacGregors, used the possibility of Cameron aid against the Clan Gregor to try to entice the king into supporting Lochail against Argyll.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the involved conservative chiefs and their kindreds only gave the appearance of carrying out anti-MacGregor orders. As Ewen Cameron of Lochail recorded, the Campbells and certain others suppressed the MacGregors with "zeal" but the kindreds of the traditional camp, including the Clan Ranald, the MacDonnells of Glengarry and the Camerons of Lochail

thought they [the MacGregors] were unjustly persecuted; and were so far from executing their commissions, that they assisted and protected them from the violence of their persecutors. 78

Eventually, Ewen's father, Allan of Lochail, found even the appearance of his persecution of the MacGregors too odious. Ewen continues:

As to Lochail, he did them no harm. They had often served him in his wars, and he was too well acquainted with their story to act the barbarous part that was enjoined him by the commission. In a word, rather than be concerned in such horrid butcherys [against the MacGregors], he chose to transact with Argyle by himself for recovering the legall title to the estate of Lochail; and submitted, in the end, to terms tht he had often refused. 79

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76. John Drummond, ed. Memoirs of Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochail, Chief of the Clan Cameron, (Edinburgh: Abbott Club, 1842), pp.47-49.

77. Ibid., p.48.

78. Ibid., p.54.

79. Ibid., p.55.

Locheil renounced his formal title and agreed to become Argyll's feudal vassal. The bargain was concluded on 22nd August 1612. The "rooting out" and "extirpation" of the Clan Gregor continued throughout the period, but without the active assistance of Locheil, Clan Ranald or Glengarry and the above observations of Locheil were substantiated in 1612 when the Privy Council charged a number of his Cameron followers and several unspecified MacDonalds to answer for "not only" refusing "to assist the said Commissioners in his Majesty's said service [against the MacGregors], but avowedly" opposing "them, declaring themselves to be friends of the Clan Gregour... so that the execution of the said service is frustrated".<sup>80</sup>

During this period Donald MacAllan had been instructed to make yearly visits to the capital to appear before the Privy Council and pledge his good conduct. In 1617 while in Edinburgh on one of these visits Donald MacAllan was presented to James VI at Holyrood House where he was knighted. In December of the following year Sir Donald MacAllan, Captain of the Clan Ranald, died.

Sir Donald's son, John MacDonald VicAllan, was the next Captain of the Clan Ranald. This chief was also frequently known as the second John Moydartach. His first years at the helm of the kindred were less eventful than those of his predecessors.

The only significant irritant in the early years of John Moydartach's leadership was related to the downfall of the MacIains of Ardnamurchan. This kindred had been so unlucky as to fall under

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80. Ibid., and R.P.C., 1610-1613, op.cit., p.337.

Argyll's superiority in the early 17th century and the Campbells seem to have used great severity when reducing the MacIain branch of Clan Donald to submission. The MacIains periodically reacted to this suppression by the Campbells in violent risings. During a respite from this strife the Captain of Clan Ranald, MacLeod of Dunvegan and MacLean of Coll entered themselves as sureties for the good behaviour of some of the principal gentlemen of the Clan Iain.<sup>81</sup> In 1624 the MacIains again rose in rebellion; this time capturing and arming an English ship and resorting to piracy. The three chiefs who had been listed as sureties for the rebels were charged to capture and reduce them. In 1625 the pirates (probably pursuing merchantmen victims too close to the Isle of Skye) found themselves in turn pursued by Sir Ruairi MacLeod at the head of his fleet. The MacIains significantly chose to beach in Clan Ranald's Moidart and attempted to hide among the woods and native people there. MacLeod with the assistance of several area kindreds and the arrival of a Campbell force searched the area and killed a few of the MacIains. It seems that a fair number of these rebels found safety among Clan Ranald's people and thereafter identified themselves with the Clan Ranald.<sup>82</sup> The evidence seems to indicate that during this period the Clan Ranald only attempted to appear energetic in the pursuit of the fleeing MacIains and that once among their Clan Ranald kinsmen the folk of Ardnamurchan were generally safe.

Clan Ranald's southern flank, once held by the MacDonalds of Clan Iain, was now in Campbell hands. This could not be to the

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81. Register of Deeds, Vol. 426, 15th June 1630.

82. Gregory, op.cit., p.411.

liking of the Chief of Clan Ranald, especially as Argyll held his superiorities - as he had held those of the MacIains. This uncomfortable situation was to last until the disruptions of 1644 threw the west Highlands and the Clan Ranald into the centre of British political and military events.



## CHAPTER I

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In 1644 the fiery cross of Alasdair MacColla and his commander, James Graham, the Marquis of Montrose, was sent among the western kindreds. During the following months Alasdair, Montrose, John Moydartach and the clans of the west Highlands were to combine to produce a remarkable chapter of British history. Indeed, for the next one hundred years these Gaelic people of the west Highlands and Isles were to play an important part in British political developments by providing the only effective and reliable military support for the House of Stewart. But before narrating the events that commenced in that year, it is necessary to look at the background, not the well covered Lowland and English political background, but that of the poorly understood Gaels themselves. In study after study the motives of these people have been disregarded or explained away in a simplistic, indeed, an absurd, fashion. Often their motives went totally unexplained; it was taken for granted that the Highlanders were always up there, always waiting for an excuse simultaneously to steal cattle and support the Stewarts. When explanations are offered, the Gaels are often depicted as "Irish and popish rebels and cut-throats"<sup>1</sup> "impelled by love of war and plunder".<sup>2</sup> It has never been satisfactorily explained how cattle theft was calculated to help the royal Stewarts.<sup>3</sup> While the motives, plots and counter-plots of the

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1. Robert Wodrow, Analecta, (Edinburgh: Printed for the Maitland Club, 1842), p.160.
  2. George Pryde, Scotland from 1603 to the Present Day, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961), p.58.
  3. In fact, cattle theft and other disruptions were detrimental to the royalists since they tended to draw governmental attention to them in periods when a "low profile" was desirable.

English-speaking participants in these events have been dealt with at great length, it is bizarre that, in the words of Niall MacMhuirich, the Clan Ranald's bard, "those who treated of the affairs of the time have made no mention at all of the Gael, the men who did all the service".<sup>4</sup> Sadly, with one or two notable exceptions, recent scholarship has done little to alter this situation. It is important not only to understand and underline MacMhuirich's point, but also to explain the many concrete reasons for this Gaelic support for the House of Stewart because it was not founded on simple-minded royalist sentiment, but on many significant and quite revealing issues.

Highlanders tended to be loyal to the Stewarts, firstly because these monarchs were commonly recognised as the legitimate Kings of Scots, the proper descendants of Fergus Mor MacErc. The Gaels were conservative and the recognition of a King of Scots was central to the kin-based society of Scotland. Their culture was expressed most basically through the kin and the central element of that culture was the clan. Each clan had its headman and over all these clan leaders was the chief of chiefs, the King of Scots. Despite the clear lack of understanding and mistreatment of the Gael by certain past Stewart monarchs and despite earlier disputes over who held the best claim to the crown, in the 17th and 18th centuries there was no such dispute. In the eyes of the conservative Gaels, the royal Stewarts, despite their many shortcomings, were the proper Kings of Scots. Indeed, it should be noted that the very title "King of Scots" is evidence of conservative Gaelic roots. The title "King of Scotland" is incorrect because historically the king

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4. Cameron, ed. (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol. II, p.177.

was leader of the people, the Scots, and not just a tract of land. The conservatism within the Gaelic world was well described by a Stewart king in the previous century. In 1522 James V said of the Gaels:

The people are tenacious of old custom, traditional matters and rites: they cannot tolerate the introduction of anything which menaces ancestral practice, and if any man ... fails in a manner of accepted custom, they consider it an imperfection or it fills them with aversion and contempt. 5

But while these beliefs were basic to the culture, there were certainly other issues, possibly by the 17th century, equally significant. These issues help to explain why other Gaelic kindreds did not feel able to support Scotland's historical monarchs that they, too, recognised.

One of the most hated institutions in the Highlands was the heritable jurisdiction. This device created a great conflict for the conservative Gaels by imposing superiors such as Campbell of Argyll, Gordon of Huntly and MacKenzie of Kintail between their own chiefs and the King of Scots. It should be noted that the placement of these lords over the various clan chiefs was a quite different matter from the historical Lordship of the Isles. As has been seen, the Lords of the Isles had long been accepted as a fundamental part of the Gaelic world. The Island Lords, unlike Argyll, Huntly and Kintail, were accepted by the people of the Lordship kindreds as the proper leaders of Gaeldom. The roots of the Lordship lay deep in the Gaelic consciousness, not so with these later superiors. True, Argyll was also MacCailein Mor, a mighty Gaelic chief, who enjoyed

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5. Denys Hay, The Letters of James V, (Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1954), p.209.



the traditional support of his Campbell kin and these Campbells, and the other hereditary followers of MacCailein Mor, realised that as their chief grew in stature so, too, their lot improved. There was no conflict between MacCailein Mor and his own kindred stemming from the heritable jurisdictions that he held over them because here, and in certain other happy cases throughout the Highlands and Isles, the superiorities happened to correspond with traditional kin-based loyalties. But to countless others, including MacDonalds, MacLeans, Stewarts, MacDugalls, Camerons, MacNabbs, MacGregors, MacNaughtons, MacNeills, MacLauchlans and Lamonts, Argyll, without any traditional kin-based right whatsoever, represented only an overmighty magnate holding the alien heritable jurisdictions over their heads.

By the 17th century the interests of these traditional Gaelic peoples were seldom those of MacCailein Mor. Indeed, as the empire that was the House of Argyll grew, it grew at the expense of the neighbouring kindreds and they knew it. To many of these clans, Argyll and his Campbells were the hereditary enemy. Consequently, orders to assist them in activities such as the crushing of the MacIains of Ardnamurchan or rooting out the hapless MacGregors were obnoxious and, yet, Argyll, holding their superiorities, held the whip hand. Any obvious reluctance could, and often did, bring similar treatment down on their heads. Of course, the fact that one of these lords held heritable jurisdiction over a given kindred did not necessarily mean that destruction was imminent. But, as MacKenzie of Kintail showed the Siol Torquil branch of the Clan Leod of Lewis and as Argyll demonstrated to the Clan Gregor and the MacIain branch of the Clan Donald before 1644 and as he was to show the Lamonts in Cowal and the MacLeans and MacQuarries of Mull, Ulva,



Morvern and Tiree later, an alien lord possessing a clan's superiorities could mean intimidation, warfare (often against hopeless odds) and disaster.

Both James VI and Charles I realised this situation. They understood that the heritable jurisdiction was hated in the Highlands and that it was responsible for much of the area's endemic violence. Both kings contemplated abolishing it<sup>6</sup> and from this fact flowed much of the Highland support for the Stewarts. The abolition of these superiorities would remove the alien element from above these various clans, enhance the position of each kindred's own chief and break the stronghold of these lords. Naturally, the kindreds suffering under the heritable jurisdiction were further inclined to support the Stewarts who contemplated its cancellation. It is equally true, but less often noted, that lords such as Argyll, who derived much of their power from superiorities, found a certain part of their opposition to the House of Stewart in their opposite reaction to the same issue.<sup>7</sup>

Another related issue is significant in explaining the Gaelic support of the Stewart line. In the past Argyll, Huntly and Kintail with, to a lesser extent, other Scottish magnates, such as Atholl

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6. Gordon Donaldson, Scotland: James V to James VII, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973), p.112.

7. It is interesting to note that heritable jurisdictions were not abolished until 1747 in the aftermath of the last Jacobite rebellion, this in an attempt to quell the clans loyal to the Stewarts. But, strangely, it is clear that one of the major goals of these Jacobite clans had been to restore the Stewarts to enable them to do precisely the same thing. This is further evidence of the government's miscomprehension of the true situation and desires of its Gaelic people. In fact, the Jacobite Highlanders drew almost all of their potent support from their traditional Gaelic kindreds in a kin-based manner and not in a feudal manner. It was their foes like Argyll and Sutherland who relied heavily on the hereditary jurisdiction to raise their less effective levees.

and Moray, had been used as royal tools to keep the Highlands quiet. In these early periods Scotland's executors had been weak with no standing army or police to maintain order. In this situation it often relied on "Letters of Fire and Sword" to empower the above mentioned lords, as well as others, to "mak utir exterminatioun and destructioun of all that [the offending] kin, thair assistaris and parte tokaris".<sup>8</sup> While the utter extermination of the offending kindred was seldom the actual result of this course of action, it did cause a considerable amount of trouble. This policy of encouraging violence, or as it has been aptly described, the policy of "setting a thief to catch a thief",<sup>9</sup> of course, led directly to further strife and expanded feuds; it was also open to other great abuses. Often the crown's representatives used their special position to legitimise and to cloak personal feuds and to mask what was a simple lust for expansion. As the king's men on the scene they were often well placed to profit when the lands in question were forfeited. All of the above mentioned lords, and to a lesser extent, other heads of Scottish clans and families, tended to move in this fashion in the Highlands, but to the Gaels the Clan Campbell was a special case.

Historically, the House of Argyll was an integral part of the Gaelic west, indeed, it appears to have developed its position on one of Somerled's two basic provinces, the land based Ri Airir Goriel, "King of Argyll", as opposed to the insular Ri Innse Gall, "King of the Hebrides (or Isles)". Originally, the Clan Campbell had been a part of the Lordship of the Isles, but as time went on

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8. Donaldson, Documents, op.cit., p.104.

9. Ibid., p.103.

it began to play an increasingly independent role and eventually began to emerge in a competition with the Lord of the Isles and started to encroach upon the traditional lands of that political sphere.<sup>10</sup> The House of Argyll's geographical position among the western kindreds, its increasing opposition first to the Lordship itself and later to the member kindreds of the old Lordship, its position as the crown's feudal lieutenant in the west Highlands and Isles, its use of the Letters of Fire and Sword, followed by the related heritable jurisdiction, its instigation and support of presbyterian ministers who were encroaching on the conservative catholic and episcopalian clans and, finally, its striking level of success all combined to create a considerable anti-Campbell Highland camp. This hatred of the Clan Campbell was not an inexplicable Gaelic peculiarity. It was a highly significant historical factor founded on concrete issues.

By 1644 the House of Argyll bore little resemblance to its predecessor that had been based at Inchconnel Castle, the old Campbells of Lochawe. Its expansion had been truly great both in terms of political power gained and of territory won, and in 1644 that expansion appeared to be accelerating. In less than fifty years Argyll had taken, along with various smaller area, Ardnamurchan from the MacIains, considerable mainland tracts of land from the MacGregors, two of the most important MacDonald areas, Islay and Kintyre, and the conservative Gaels in Ireland were also feeling considerable Campbell pressure. Truly, the expansionist from Inverary was a serious threat to the western kindreds. This opposi-

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10. Steer and Bannerman, op.cit., p.212.



tion to the Campbells further inclined many of the threatened or already conquered peoples of the west Highlands and Isles into any camp that held the potential of curbing the Clan Campbell. From 1644 the royal Stewarts were the focal point of such a group.

By 1644 there can be no doubt that this anti-Campbell Highland faction was real and that it was moving ever closer into the Stewart camp. James Hamilton, the 3rd Marquis and 1st Duke of Hamilton, felt that many clans would join Charles not so much out of affection for the Stewarts as because of their "spleen to Argyll" and he further noted that these Gaels would "dou... just contrarie to what his [Argyll's] men doeth".<sup>11</sup> It has been stated that "the fact that the 'anti-Campbell coalition' was largely the creation of Hamilton during the summer of 1638 has been overlooked".<sup>12</sup> Hamilton certainly played a role in pulling this anti-Campbell group together in this period, but his importance should not be overstressed. It should be remembered that he was merely exploiting an existing situation. Long before he appeared on the scene these Gaelic people had felt inclined to support the King of Scots and had seen the House of Argyll as an enemy. The conservative Gaels were quite accustomed to banding together to pursue their mutual goals and knew that two Stewart kings had contemplated abolishing the heritable jurisdictions. Hamilton wisely interpreted the existing situation; he did not "create" it. This distinction is significant because in far too many studies,<sup>13</sup> Highlanders are incorrectly presented as an unsophisticated people who did not understand their own interests and thus were easily

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11. H.M.C., XI, appx. VI, Hamilton, p.95.

12. Cowan, op.cit., p.50.

13. This observation does not include Mr. Cowan's Montrose, for Covenant and King.



manipulated by others such as Hamilton; this was seldom the case.

In 1638, while acting as Charles I's commissioner, Hamilton received a letter from Sir Donald Gorm MacDonald of Sleat saying that he had contacted John Moydartach, Captain of Clan Ranald, Donald MacDonald of Strome, Angus MacDonnell of Glengarry and "our haill name of Clan Donald who hes swairne to die and live with me in the kingis service".<sup>14</sup> Ranald MacDonnell, Earl of Antrim and head of the family of MacDonald of Dunivaig and the Glens (the old Islay family), also pledged his support about this time. The lands in Islay and Kintyre had been lost to the Campbells and Antrim volunteered to lead an army of Irishmen and Hebridean MacDonalds against the Campbells.<sup>15</sup> In 1639 Charles I met Antrim and Sleat near Berwick and jointly commissioned them as his lieutenants in the Highlands and Isles and promised them both vast tracts of Campbell land.<sup>16</sup> In the following year Sir Donald Gorm appears on a bond of loyalty to Charles, along with John Moydartach, MacLean of Duart, MacKenzie of Seaforth and MacLeod of Harris.<sup>17</sup> The kindreds of the west Highlands and Isles were clearly feeling that their interest and their king's interest were the same. In view of this state of affairs, it has been said, "the anti-Campbell coalition was therefore real enough".<sup>18</sup> This is a compelling point, but one related fact must be remembered. These allied anti-Campbell clans were not initiating this course out of a void; they were reacting to what they saw as Campbell aggression. From their point of view they were bonding together in self-

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14. H.M.C., XXI, Hamilton Supplement, p.50.

15. Cowan, op.cit., pp.50-51.

16. George Hill, An Historical Account of the MacDonnells of Antrim, (Belfast, 1873), pp.254 & 444.

17. H.M.C., IX, pt. II, Traquair, p.255.

18. Cowan, op.cit., pp.53-54.

defence.<sup>19</sup>

When looking into the origins of Gaelic loyalty to the Stewarts, religion cannot be overstressed as a central factor. It is important to note that a substantial portion, indeed, a majority, of that Highland support for the old line was drawn from episcopalian kindreds, but as this study centres on the catholic Clan Ranald, it will stress that catholic aspect and its background. With the coming of the Reformation in 1560, the catholic Highland establishment was reduced to a shambles. For the most part the folk of the western Isles and adjacent mainland parishes were simply left alone. Some priests fled and other more fortunate priests remained in their parishes, probably under the protection of and in hiding with local chiefs who were often their kin, but due to the anti-catholic climate, penal statutes against priests and the constant danger of arrest, it does not seem that the remaining catholic clergymen had much contact with the majority of the people; and, in any case, as these incumbents died out, they were not replaced. Replacements were not forthcoming for a variety of reasons: because it was difficult to find Gaelic-speaking priests, Ireland's catholic establishment was occupied fighting its own struggles;<sup>20</sup> because penal legislation against catholicism was more rigorously enforced in Scotland than in any other nation;<sup>21</sup> because of the harsh nature of the terrain and climate; and simply

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19. See Appendix II for a more detailed discussion of the extent of this Campbell transformation and its significance for the conservative west Highland clans.

20. Duncan Canon MacLean, "Catholicism in the Highlands and Isles, 1560-1680", The Innes Review, Scottish Catholic Historical Studies, Vol.III, (Glasgow: The Scottish Catholic Historical Committee, 1953), p.5.

21. John Lorne Campbell, "The Catholic Church in the Hebrides: 1560-1760", The Tablet, a Weekly Newspaper & Review, (London: 31 December 1955), p.655.

because the catholic authorities in Rome had more appealing targets such as the Far East, Armenia, the Levant and the Americas.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the protestant camp did remarkably little with this opportunity. Events were breaking fast for protestants in the Lowlands and Borders as well as England; moreover, apart from the southern Argyllshire bounds of the Clan Campbell, Gaelic-speaking ministers were difficult to find; and, finally, it should be added, as long as the catholic enemy remained relatively quiet and inactive in the Highlands, the basic prejudice of the Scottish Lowlander inclined him to take as little notice of the Gael in religious matters as he did in any other. By the end of the 16th century much of Gaelic-speaking Scotland had become a "spiritual vacuum".<sup>23</sup>

This situation was not directly dealt with by either church until the protestant establishment moved in 1609 with the Statutes of Iona. Among other conditions, these statutes forced formal acceptance of the established protestant religion and the obligation to have children of substantial chiefs and chieftains educated in the Lowlands as English-speaking protestants (where they could easily be used as hostages).<sup>24</sup> It was not until that same year that there was any record of ministers being appointed to Hebridean parishes and even these late appointments were very few.<sup>25</sup> As has been previously stated,<sup>26</sup> the Statutes of Iona serve as more an indication of the desires of Lowland authorities than as an indicator of a real shift in the western Highland and Hebridean realities. Gaels, pressured

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22. Anthony Ross, Scottish Blackfriars, (Glasgow: John S. Burns & Sons, 1972), p.9.

23. Campbell, op.cit., p.655.

24. Donaldson, Documents, op.cit., pp.171-75.

25. Campbell, op.cit., p.655.

26. See above, pp.47-50.



by the recent downfall of their kin and allies in Ulster, dutifully showed up at Iona and signed the documents, but it would be a mistake to over-emphasise the general importance of the Iona Statutes and their specific religious significance.. As is seen in the continued traditional education of future Hebridean chiefs such as that of the young John Moydartach with his uncle, Ranald, the Tutor of Benbecula, Gaels were not keen to change, and as is seen in the small number of ministers appointed to the area, protestants did not, or could not, press their advantage.

By the early decades of the 17th century, 40-50 years after the Reformation, catholics were just beginning to take notice of conditions in the Highlands and with this religious situation, as with so many other aspects of Highland history, the answers came from Ireland. As a recent author has correctly observed, "community with Ireland in language and traditions fostered the survival of Catholicism in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland".<sup>27</sup>

Around 1618 an Irish Jesuit, Father David Gallway, was sent through the southern Hebridean islands and in Islay and Colonsay he found people who had never seen a priest.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, something of an intellectual conflict was brewing over the issue. Thomas Dempster, a Scottish priest, had published a historical work that gave little credit to Irish missionary work in Scotland. In 1621, Dempster was answered by an Irish Jesuit, probably Henry Fitzsimon, who published Hiberniae sive Antiquioris Scotiae vindiciae adversus Thomam Dempsterum. Here, Fitzsimon - accurately - charged the Scots clergy with neglect of the Highland people and an indifference to their spiritual needs.<sup>29</sup>

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27. Campbell, op.cit., p.655.

28. Ibid.

29. MacLean, op.cit., p.7.



And, if they indicate nothing else, Gallway's tour and the conflict between Dempster and Fitzsimon show that catholics were finally beginning to realise that a considerable problem, and opportunity, existed in the Hebrides and western Highlands; and it was the Irish who seemed first to notice. From this point catholic interest and activity in the area, with the hostility of the Scottish kirk and its Highland adherents, is a constant feature of the history of the area.

In the early 17th century this activity was limited primarily to Franciscan missionaries because the Congregation of Propaganda Fidei in Rome did not want to see a competition develop between the Dominicans and Franciscans in such a difficult and impoverished area.<sup>30</sup> In 1624-1626 four Irish Franciscans worked successfully throughout the area. They seemed to have been quite well received by most of the people, including several chiefs, and many were won over to the catholic faith. On Clan Ranald's lands Father Cornelius Ward (Conchobhair Mac an B<sup>h</sup>aird) achieved notable success both with the chief, John Moydartach, and the people of Clan Ranald.

On 20th August 1625, Ward reports that when travelling from Mull and his successful conference with MacLean of Lochbuie, he met "one of the principal gentry of Innse Gall",<sup>31</sup> John Moydartach, the Captain of Clan Ranald. Of him Ward states:

This man who was brought back to the bosom of Mother Church on the previous year by Paul O'Neill, to the great joy of the faithful, for he was a powerful man and of outstanding integrity, received us with extraordinary kindness. 32

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30. Ross, op.cit., p.9.

31. The Hebrides.

32. John Lorne Campbell, "The Letter sent by Iain Muideartach Twelfth Chief of Clanranald, to Pope Urban VIII, in 1626". The Innes Review, Scottish Catholic Historical Studies, Vol. IV, (Glasgow: The Scottish Catholic Historical Committee, 1953), p.110.

Ward also narrates that he stayed with John Moydartach "some days" and gave religious instruction to his wife, his brother and fifteen of his household. The Captain of Clan Ranald also "sent letters with me [Ward] to His Holiness", Pope Urban VIII, and "encouraged" Ward's journeys to Eigg, Canna, South Uist and Benbecula.

On 28th August 1626, Ward journeyed to the Isle of Eigg where all the chief men and their households were won over to the catholic faith, save one who was a relative of the minister. This minister, Neill MacKinnon, was upset over the "great number" of Ward's converts and came to Eigg one night with a contingent of soldiers with the intention of "killing or capturing" Ward. The priest reports that he was saved when some of the newly converted Clan Ranald daoine-uaisle banded together and threatened the minister and his followers "with death". The protestant troops departed, MacKinnon vowing revenge. Ward further reported that the "laird of the Island" feared reprisals on the catholics so he made an agreement whereby MacKinnon was guaranteed a third of the tiends if he would never again molest the catholics or their priests. At the time Ward wrote his report, Rev. MacKinnon was still faithful to his agreement. While on Eigg Ward was visited by Father Paul O'Neill, another of the Franciscan missionaries and the man who had earlier converted John Moydartach, and the two priests spent several days among the people of Eigg. When Ward left Eigg and journeyed to the Island of Rhum, he was accompanied by "Clanranald's brother and other members of the gentry".<sup>33</sup> After leaving the MacLean Isle of Rhum, Ward laboured back among Clan

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33. Cathaldus Giblin, Irish Franciscan Mission to Scotland, 1619-1646. Documents from Roman Archives, (Dublin: Assisi Press, 1864), pp.65-66.

Ranald's people on the Island of Canna where his experience was less satisfying for he reports that while his preaching pleased the people, they did not put his advice into practice.

Children of the earth as they were, they were intent on the crops, not their salvation, and, as it was autumn, they paid more attention to the harvest than their souls. 34

This section of Ward's report is significant. It states, in Ward's own words, that he was less than successful on Canna and so it shows that, while influence was likely, there was no open coercion from the Captain of Clan Ranald, despite his fervour for the catholic cause. This lack of force is clear because Canna, like Eigg and Moidart before, and South Uist and Benbecula after, was under the sway of John Moydartach and yet, unlike Eigg or any of these other Clan Ranald territories, the people of Canna were polite but clearly rejected - and felt able to reject - Ward's appeals.

After a rough crossing from Canna, Ward arrived in South Uist where, after word of his arrival spread, he was met by a large crowd, "some anxious to learn about the faith, some merely curious". The leading men of South Uist promised to accept Ward's faith "if they found Ward's arguments more convincing than those put forward by the ministers". Ward went on to observe that

The people were in a dilemma; unless they accepted the faith they would find it difficult to be saved, and yet if they professed it, imprisonment and ruin would be their lot; they could flee to a foreign land and avoid persecution, but it would be impossible to bring their children; the gentry whom Ward had invited to come to hear him preaching said it was difficult to embrace catholicism, seeing that no catholic priest had visited them for about one hundred years, and that there was nobody to instruct the ignorant even if the people decided to become catholics. 35

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34. Ibid., p.68.

35. Ibid., p.69.



When Ward promised that he or some other priest would visit them every year, substantial numbers were converted to the catholic faith.

On Benbecula Ward met Ranald MacDonald of Castle Borge, sometimes known as the Tutor of Benbecula, John Moydartach's uncle and tutor.

This Clan Ranald duin-usal was described by Ward as "a staunch defender of catholicism".<sup>36</sup>

Ward discovered that Father O'Neill and Father Patrick Brady were already staying with the Tutor of Benbecula; during this stay many of Benbecula's household were won over. Clearly,

Ranald MacDonald of Castle Borge was a valuable ally to these priests.

The important position of the Benbecula family throughout the 17th century in religion and other matters will be discussed below<sup>37</sup> but

here it is desirable simply to say that a succession of the leading

men from this influential Benbecula family played the role of stal-

warts for the catholic cause in the area and helped to set the entire

region's political and religious tone by serving as tutors for several

young men who were to be significant as future Captains of Clan Ranald.

These future chiefs were all noted for their Gaelic conservatism, and

included the current John Moydartach. In these two ways it will be

seen that this powerful, influential and extremely conservative

Benbecula family played a central role in the religious and political

development of the Clan Ranald and of the general area.

Using the Tutor of Benbecula's Castle Borge as their Outer Hebridean base, O'Neill and Brady moved off to visit MacLeod of Harris and other areas in the north - areas where Ranald of Benbecula and John Moydartach held considerable influence. From this same base Ward worked throughout Benbecula, South Uist and Barra. After

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36. Ibid., p.72.

37. See below, pp.162-166.



his successful mission among MacNeill of Barra's folk (the current Barra family being close relatives of the Captain of Clan Ranald, having been actually placed in their position of power by him<sup>38</sup>), Ward again returned to Benbecula and from Castle Borge worked among the people of South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist. When discussing South Uist and Benbecula along with North Uist, Ward makes the ties between those on Clanranald's South Uist and Benbecula and those on MacDonald of Sleat's North Uist clear. The report states that

Bonds of relationship and friendship existed between the people of North and South Uist, and Ward's successes in converting so many in North Uist meant that the inhabitants of both isles would continue to live in peace and amity; he converted thirty-six, including Ranald MacDonald, the minister of the island [North Uist], and his two brothers. 39

On 20th January 1626, Ward bade farewell to Clanranald and moved from Benbecula to Barra, then Canna, Mull, Islay, Kintyre and finally Ireland and the continent. Before moving on to the continent Ward had left Ranald MacDonald the former minister of North Uist to study in Ireland because he had decided to become a priest. In Europe Ward travelled through Paris and later on to Rome. From Paris on 1st July 1626, Ward wrote an interesting letter to the Archbishop of Armagh.

In it he said:

I am carrying with me a letter from the ruler of the whole clan of Ranald in which by common consent they profess obedience to the Holy See, asking apostolic benediction and favour for the spread of the faith in the whole of Scotland. Other important men also who were converted profess and ask the same thing although for now not by letter, as McLeod of Harries, the Laird [Campbell] of Calder, the Laird [Campbell] of Barbreck, Coll Ciotach MacDonald [of Colonsay], the Laird [MacLean] of Lochbuy, the family of the Mac-

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38. See above, p.51.

39. Gibling, op.cit., p.76.

Donalds of Kintyre and Islay, with all their subjects and with the inhabitants of the islands of Hebridies, Jura, Aran, Uist, Canna and Barra etc. The afore-said chieftains ask also for a bishop ordained by the apostolic see and for parish priests for the firm preservation of the faith for the future. 40

When Ward stated that John Moydartach asked for "favour for the spread of the faith in the whole of Scotland", he was not overstating the Captain of Clan Ranald's position. In fact, John Moydartach offered to lead a catholic crusade to restore the old faith. For a variety of reasons this letter is of central importance to this study; therefore, it will be quoted at length. The chief of Clan Ranald stated that he, John Moydartach,

... with [his listed kin] rulers of lands, men of ancient nobility, and the people subject to the same clan, all of us unanimously ascribe ... thanksgiving ... to the one three-fold omnipotent God ... For His greatness and kindness has designed to regard us with the eyes of His mercy, redeeming and enlightening our people who for this long time have sat in darkness; the darkness I mean of error, which the turbulent detested followers of the accursed faithless Calvin had introduced, through the violence and tyranny of the Council of Scotland, razing our churches, profaning our cemeteries, tearing down, treading underfoot, breaking up, burning our altars and sacred images, as indeed the memory of aged surviving witnesses bears testimony.

... we find nothing so displeasing as his [Father Cornelius Ward's] absence, were it not for the hope that he may in a short time return to us (having been granted what he seeks from Your Holiness). I, moreover, with the rest of the nobles and the other classes, pledge and promise to him after his return every help for the greater spread and preservation of the faith among us as we shall prove beyond doubt by deeds, by a perilous war, by shedding of blood and, should it be necessary, by our own death for the defence of the faith. We are confident ... that we the aforementioned clan together with that numerous and distinguished clan than which there is none more

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40. Campbell, The Letter, op.cit., p.113.

noble in the whole kingdom, from whose bosom we the younger are descended [Clan Donald], shall with the help of our kinsfolk and friends subdue the greater part of Scotland, without the assistance of anyone else; though we could not keep it long against the power of the King unless aided by your Holiness or by the power of Catholic kings. Wherefore we humbly beseech Your Holiness that if matters should ever reach this state (as we think they undoubtedly will) your patronage and assistance will not be wanting to us ... The greatest hope of success is in the fact this part of Scotland, always accustomed to arms, has become warlike, strong in battle, favoured by victory and at one time fierce and obstinate against the Romans themselves in the fact that often, smaller in numbers but superior in strength, we have beaten the Britons, from the fact also that many centuries ago our ancestors crossed from Ireland and drove out the Picts, the first inhabitants of the land, and after that we have never been driven out by anyone, nor have any of us to this day been subject to any external prince or power. Our country and islands are in themselves difficult for an enemy to approach bound as by impregnable walls into a fortification, the sea flowing among them and ... with safe harbours and anchorages for ships of every kind, small and large, and they are far removed from the incursions and outrages of the English to whom we have never at all given obedience. All the Gaelic speaking Scots and the greater part of the Irish chieftains joined to us by ties of friendship, from whom we once received the faith ... from whose stock we first sprang, will begin war each in his own district to the glory of God ... we are confident too, from the fact that these districts are by nature defended and inaccessible and in the power of our nobles and brothers and friends, that it is not necessary to assist us with great expenditure, nor is there desired from Your Holiness or from anyone else anything more than a very slight assistance, namely four ships well fitted for war and sufficient arms for us to equip 7,000 or so of our subjects. 41

The Captain of Clan Ranald, while making certain grandiose claims, has nevertheless left a historical marker of considerable importance for the whole field of Highland history for several basic reasons. First, this letter helps to show the position of importance

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41. Ibid., pp.113-116.



the Chief of Clan Ranald held among other Hebridean and west Highland chiefs; here, he is offering to lead the Gaelic west in a crusade and subsequent events show that he was not overstating his position of power and influence relative to other area leaders.<sup>42</sup> Second, it shows the fiercely independent attitude and clear awareness of the area's tactical strength that was to incline several generations of Gaelic chiefs repeatedly to resort to war in attempts to gain their political and religious goals. Third, it displays the religious fervour of the period. And, finally, it gives insights into the attitudes of this most important west Highland chief in the field of religion, where this man, John Moydartach, played a central role in helping to build the foundation of which Hebridean catholic strength rests to this day.<sup>43</sup> Why was John Moydartach's assistance so valuable to catholics at this critical moment?

The Clan Ranald family had played a central role in the leadership of the Lordship of the Isles and in area developments since its fall. The MacLeods of Lewis and the MacIains of Ardnamurchan had received Clan Ranald aid. The clans of the conservative west Highland block had flocked to the first John Moydartach's banner in the Blair na Leine campaign. This first John Moydartach had been one of the two Hebridean leaders in Donald Dubh's 1545 entourage during that last major attempt to restore the Lordship of the Isles. And so, the influential position of the current Captain of Clan Ranald was founded on a historically accepted position of leadership and it was founded on hard current realities. In the early and mid 17th century the second John Moydartach's family was related by marriage to most

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42. See below, pp.100-102.

43. Campbell, The Letter, op.cit., p.111, and Catholic Church, op.cit., p.655.



leading members of the Clan Donald in Ireland, the Hebrides and the Scottish mainland. Family ties were close between his family and the MacLeans of Duart. His own wife was the daughter of Ruairi Mor MacLeod of Dunvegan and Harris. He had personally placed one of his own nephews at the helm of the MacNeills of Barra in the complicated aftermath of the downfall of Ruairi "the turbulent", the old MacNeill chief. And John Moydartach's numerous and warlike kindred occupied some of the least accessible strongholds in the western and Hebridean section of Scotland. Also, his current loose connections with the MacLeods in Harris and Skye and with the MacDonalds of Sleat in Skye and North Uist left him relatively secure from the north.<sup>44</sup> The significance of his support to the catholic authorities has been noted recently:

It is not surprising that the Catholic regions of the Hebrides today coincide with the old Clanranald estates, with the addition of Barra which remained Catholic very largely under the Clanranald influence: and it is significant that in 1755, 5,979 out of the 16,490 Catholics in Scotland were living on the Clanranald and MacNeill of Barra estates. 45

The religious and political significance of John Moydartach is certain, but it must be pointed out that while this Clan Ranald chief envisioned a catholic crusade, it never came about. On a religious level what actually developed was a combined catholic and episcopalian reaction to presbyterian encroachment. While a substantial portion of the pre-Stewart Gaels were catholic, especially in 1644, many were also episcopalian and as time went on the percentage of the episcopalians in the Stewart ranks was to increase. Many of the MacLeans,

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44. Campbell, Catholic Church, op.cit., p.656.

45. Campbell, The Letter, op.cit., p.111.

Stewarts of Appin, Camerons, MacLauchlans, MacDonalds of Glencoe, Clan Chattan, MacNabbs and the Stewarts and Robertsons of Atholl were episcopalian. In far too many studies of Scottish history, Highland support for the royal Stewarts has been depicted as being primarily MacDonald and catholic. This was not the case and since this enquiry happens to focus on the catholic MacDonalds of Clan Ranald, it seems necessary to stress this point. Again, these kindreds, catholic and episcopalian alike, shared a common problem. The ministers of the presbyterian kirk were increasing their pressure and again, it must be added, Argyll's hand could be discerned among the causes of this predicament.

In another sense this revived catholicism gave Highland chiefs a wider base from which to resist Lowland cultural and political influence. Before, they could react in a negative manner to the incursion of Lowland and Campbell backed protestantism, but after the early 17th century work of the Irish priests a more positive counter-reformation religious zeal, such as that depicted in John Moydartach's letter to the Pope, could be employed. Moreover, this revived religious fervour for the catholic cause had been spread by Irish priests teaching in Gaelic; this naturally tended to strengthen west Highland ties with Gaelic Ireland, links that were underscored in John Moydartach's letter.<sup>46</sup> Finally, one other point can be made concerning the religious causes of Highland support for the Stewarts; if presbyterians in the Lowlands and Argyllshire feared, wrongly, that King Charles' policies were moving towards the restoration of catholicism, then west Highlanders, equally in error, could hope that these

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46. David Stevenson, Alasdair MacColla and the Highland Problem in the Seventeenth Century, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1980), p.54.

policies had such a goal and were, therefore, further inclined to support his faction.<sup>47</sup>

The origins of Gaelic loyalty to the royal House of Stewart have been seen to stem from a variety of factors which, if viewed together, lead to an exciting conclusion. They all indicate that in the Highlands, the politically conservative Stewart camp was at once the culturally conservative Gaelic camp. The following are the political reasons for Highland support of the royal Stewarts and it will be seen that every reason was one which would simultaneously appeal to culturally defensive Gaels: the kin-based and traditional support of the true chief of chiefs; the hatred of alien feudal devices such as the heritable jurisdiction that had been forced on the Gaels by representatives of another culture and that disrupted their traditional kin-based leadership; the protection of the two conservative forms of religion; and the increasing bad blood between these conservative kindreds and the Clan Campbell, the area's prime representative of the foreign southern culture, the chief user of and profiter from devices such as the heritable jurisdiction and one of the instigators and the major west Highland supporter of the encroaching presbyterian ministers. Furthermore, it will be noted that with very few exceptions the pro-Stewart kindreds were either member kindreds of the old Lordship or clans living in the area influenced by that conservative political and cultural sphere. With the exception of the conquered and dispersed kindreds such as the MacLeods of Lewis, the MacIains of Ardnamurchan and MacDonalds of Islay and Kintyre and of a few clans such as the MacLeods of Dunvegan who had embraced the covenanting

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47. Ibid., p.64.



religion, the vast majority of the old lordship kindreds made up the core of pro-Stewart Gaeldom. Indeed, it has recently been observed of these Lordship kindreds and their earlier struggle to re-establish the Lordship of the Isles:

The forfeiture of 1493 proved to be the final one, but not without a struggle which was to continue over a period of fifty years or more; a struggle which is reminiscent, on a smaller scale, of the long series of risings on behalf of the royal house of Stewart in the 17th and 18th centuries, not least because many of the Lordship clans were embroiled in both. 48

There is ample evidence to support the contention that the pro-Stewart kindreds represented the conservative Gaelic camp. In the Isles something of a conservative community of interest is seen in the reaction to the attempted settlement of Lewis by the Fife Adventurers. In this episode the MacLeods of Lewis enjoyed considerable support from area kindreds and as has been seen,<sup>49</sup> not all of these supportive clans were involved for selfish motives, although it must be pointed out that the MacKenzies were a special case and not a former Lordship kindred. True, the MacDonalds of Sleat, the MacLeods of Harris and Dunvegan and the MacKenzies of Kintail had reasons of their own for backing the Lewis clan, but equally, despite this self-interest, it can be noted that none of these three kindreds ever acted in anything other than a conservative manner and that none of them ever supported outsiders against the natives of Lewis.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, it is certain that the aid offered by the Clan Ranald and the MacNeills of Barra was not based on self-interest, but on a desire to aid a fellow island kindred against outsiders and on a

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48. Steer and Bannerman, op.cit., pp.209-10.

49. See above, p.43.

50. See above, p.44.



desire to halt the general advance of alien culture and influence into the Hebrides. Despite the eventual defeat of the Lewis MacLeods (not, however, by outsiders), all of these ex-Lordship kindreds were to continue to act as members of the conservative camp and they were to be pro-Stewart. On the mainland the above discussed Blair na Leine campaign<sup>51</sup> displayed something of a land-based and conservative west Highland community of interest supporting the Clan Ranald in its attempt to preserve the leader of its choice, (the first) John Moydartach, against outside forces. The Clan Ranald was joined in this struggle by the MacDonnells of Keppoch, the MacIains of Ardnamurchan, the MacDonnells of Glengarry and the Clan Cameron. Every one of these kindreds had been members of the old Lordship of the Isles and their support of the Clan Ranald can be seen as an attempt to buttress the area's, and their own, conservative Gaelic development.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in 1609, despite recent enmities, the Clan Ranald and the MacDonnells of Glengarry had supported Cameron of Locheil at court when he lost his feudal titles to Argyll and all

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51. See above, p.

52. This conclusion fits with the observation of David Stevenson in his study (Alasdair MacColla, op.cit., p.44), in another context, that of the downfall of the Clan Iain Mor, the MacDonalds of Islay. Here, Stevenson notes that Sir James MacDonald of the Islay family received help from the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald and Keppoch. "This suggests that Sir James had received promises of at least some assistance from other MacDonald chiefs for an attempt to drive Calder's men from Islay before the Campbell hold on the island could be consolidated. Such help would not be given simply to support the wronged Sir James, but out of fear for their own future. In less than a decade the Campbells had gained Kintyre, Islay, Jura, Colonsay, Ardnamurchan and Sunart, all at the expense of the MacDonalds; how long would it be before, having destroyed the Clan Iain Mor and the MacDonalds of Ardnamurchan, the Campbells turned on the other MacDonald chiefs."

three of these clans gave as much support as was possible to the hard-pressed Clan Gregor.

Why were some of these kindreds involved in only one or two of these issues while other clans, especially the Clan Ranald, were involved in several? Geography offers the best explanation.

Reasonably enough, the island kindreds were entangled in the Lewis episode and the mainland-based clans were involved in the Blair na Leine campaign, in Lochell's legal struggle with Argyll and in the related MacGregor problem.<sup>53</sup>

The Clan Ranald, the only kindred holding lands in the Isles as well as on the mainland, found itself inclined and physically able to bring its conservatism to bear on all of these issues. The Clan Ranald, the MacNeills of Barra, the MacDonnells of Keppoch, the Clan Cameron, the MacDonnells of Glengarry and the MacDonalds of Sleat were all involved in these early conservative stands, they had been members of the old Lordship of the Isles, they had all supported the attempts to restore the Lordship and they were the basic core of the pro-Stewart Highland camp.

It is interesting and instructive to note that, with the exception of the decimated MacIains, the covenanting MacLeods and the sometimes active and sometimes wavering MacDonalds of Sleat, every one of these west Highland and Island kindreds was to join the Clan Ranald in 1644, 1688, 1715 and 1745; it is unreasonable to ignore this mass of recurring evidence.

True, not every kindred that backed the royal house of Stewart had been a member of the Lordship, but even those area kindreds with quite different origins, faced much the same cultural and political

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53. See above, pp.30,43-44 & 52-54.

environment and tended to react in a similar manner. Kindreds such as the Stewarts of Appin had not been members of the Lordship; in fact, they had originally supported their royal kin against the Lordship. It is known that James IV was twice in the west Highlands in 1493. It has been speculated that he may have actually forfeited the Lordship of the Isles from Castle Stalker, the island fortress that was the home of Duncan Stewart, the 2nd of Appin, and it is certain that James IV appointed Duncan to the office of King's Chamberlain of the Isles in the same period.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, it is known that the Appin Stewarts suffered at the hands of the forces of the Lordship in 1506 because of their support of its royal enemy.<sup>55</sup> But these Stewarts lived among the conservative west Highland peoples, enjoyed the loyal support of their Gaelic followers, the MacColls, Livingstones, Colquhouns and Carmichaels and were closely allied with the MacLarens of Balquhidder; the Stewarts inter-married with the heads of neighbouring clans, especially the Camerons of Locheil, and became quite integrated in the culture and affairs of the Gaelic west. It is interesting and instructive to note that the Stewarts of Appin formed such close ties with their followers, the MacColls, that every Stewart chieftain was said to have been buried between two leading MacColls.<sup>56</sup> This close relationship between the Stewart chief and his tenants is also evidenced in a letter of 12th April 1662 from Archibald Campbell to Sir John Campbell of Glenorchy. Glenorchy

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54. John and Duncan Stewart, The Stewarts of Appin, (Edinburgh: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1880), pp.85 & 96, Ian Grimble, Scottish Clans, (London: Hamly, 1973), p.257, and John Stewart, The Camerons, (Stirling: Jamieson & Munro Ltd., 1974), p.19.
55. Gregory, op.cit., pp.102-03.
56. See Isabel Frances Grant, Highland Folk Ways, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p.21.



had tried to rent certain of the Appin lands, but was rejected by Duncan Stewart of Appin. Archibald gives the following explanation for the rejection:

I give you the letter to the Laird of Appin who (as ye may see by his answer) is not willing to grant or to let of what he has of that grassing upon the plea that his own tennants can not spaire it. I spoke seriously anent it. But found him not inclined to condesend ... I think your lo/ may cause deall with Appins tennants and if they will declaer that they can spaire as much as will accomodat your tennants in that grassing it may happily cause Appin consent. 57

This cultural integration was almost inevitable in a region like Appin so solidly within the old Lordship sphere.

The influences at work upon these Stewarts were not merely cultural, but also included political issues. The Stewarts of Appin became estranged from their old allies, the Clan Campbell, around 1520 when their superiorities fell into the hands of Sir John Campbell of Calder, Argyll's brother. Again, the heritable jurisdiction in Campbell hands led to strife, this time with the Stewarts and Camerons, who had also lost their superiorities. These two kindreds allied against the Campbells. Allan Stewart of Duror and his neighbour, Ewen MacAllan Cameron of Lochell, violently resisted the Campbell interference with some initial success, but Calder eventually established some control over the area by transferring his titles to his powerful brother Argyll.<sup>58</sup> This move gave the Campbell faction the upper hand, but the Stewarts intermittently continued the struggle throughout the century.<sup>59</sup> In 1644 all these factors bore down on this Stewart kindred and combined with two other significant points: they

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57. GD112/39/946.

58. Gregory, op.cit., pp.126-27.

59. Ibid., p.255.



were episcopalian and had a clear interest in supporting their (very distant) royal kin. This about-face is interesting. The Stewarts of Appin were initially hostile to the Lordship but lived well within its sphere of conservative Gaelic influence and eventually became closely assimilated into the traditional Gaelic world. A number of factors combined with the basic absorption of the traditional culture to move the Appin people into the conservative Gaelic and pro-Stewart camp. Loss of heritable jurisdiction to the Campbells, alliance both politically and matrimonially with traditional area kindreds, unwelcomed presbyterian pressure (Campbell backed) and support for the old line of kings were all factors playing on the Appin Stewarts and factors quite similar to those influencing the former Lordship kindreds.

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In 1644, under Montrose, Alasdair MacColla and, to a lesser degree, John Moydartach, Captain of Clan Ranald, all these factors were to combine in a striking manner and draw the forces of this conservative Gaelic block together. British political developments were to be the catalyst that pulled a fragmented conservative people into something of a unified force. This involvement in the political fortunes of the royal House of Stewart had two important effects on these Gaels. Firstly, and in the long run the most important, it was to hasten the dismemberment of their traditional world. But, secondly, its immediate effect was something quite different. These people, divided as they were into numerous mutually mistrustful and occasionally conflicting kindreds, were easy prey to outside forces that had tended to deal with them one at a time. The earlier unified Gaelic

conservatism, evidenced, for example, in the rallying of area clans to support the Clan Ranald during the hostility surrounding the Blar na Leine episode, had declined. The MacIains, MacDonalds and MacGregors were quietly assisted by their neighbours, but, as evidenced by the meek reaction to the Statutes of Iona, these sympathetic Gaels no longer felt able openly to defy the incoming forces.

The members of the Clan Ranald and the Athollmen were Gaels, but for geographical and religious reasons unlikely allies. Before 1644 no Athollman would follow a Clan Ranald chief and the reverse was equally true. It took broader political issues to unite these peoples with other equally uncertain kindreds into something of a united force. After this had been successfully accomplished by the able Montrose in 1644 and 1645, a new factor was added to the list of reasons explaining Highland support for the royal Stewarts. The conservative Gaels were, of course, closely tied to tradition and they were intimately involved in a warrior society with a long tradition of extolling military feats and the warrior virtues. Their society was structured to speed mobilization; their literature often praised the martial feats of their forebears. Once Hamilton's schemes, Montrose's talents and the west Highland realities combined to pull these Gaels together and especially after their series of rousing and satisfying victories, something of a tradition of military support for the Stewarts was created. Once initiated into the folklore of the various clans, once the stories of the father's and uncle's heroic deeds at Inverlochy were passed down to the next generation, then future unified efforts were less difficult to contemplate and to create. And here, it is not necessary to rely even on the mass of Gaelic poetry that extols military service to the Stewarts.

The point is equally well illustrated in the Memoirs of Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochell. Despite the young Cameron chief's having been "fostered" by the Marquis of Argyll, once Lochell returned to his people

He was so much delighted with the recitall of Montrose his actions, that he kept Collonel Cameron, who commanded the party of his Clan, that served under that hero, about him in all his diversions. ... There was no circumstance of these wars but Lochell informed himself of with the most inquisitive curiosity; and was so charmed with the valure and conduct of the illustrious General, that he often bewailed his misfortune in the want of opportunity of being trained up in that noble school: but being still in hopes that so generous a patriot would not long delay to make another vigorous effort for the relief of his miserable countray, he resolved chierefully to joyn him at the head of his Clan. 60

Later, when Lochell observed a party of Cromwellian soldiers much larger than his own band leaving the safety of Fort William, he contemplated an attack.

There were one or two present who had served under Montrose. Lochell asked their oppinions separatly, but they declared, that they never knew him engadge under so great a dissadvantage of force; ... But, notwithstanding all of this, Lochell was so resolute that he would not be dissuaded from the hazardous attempt. Whither pushed on by an excess of courage, or by a youthful spiritt of emulation, (for he had Montrose alwise in his mouth,) it is certain that he never appeared absolutely inexorable but on this occasion. 61

Clearly, Montrose himself and his glorious campaign created something of a tradition of service to the House of Stewart within the young Lochell and doubtless in others as well.

It is difficult to imagine this Gaelic army failing to note its

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60. Drummond, ed., op.cit., p.86.

61. Ibid., p.114.



potential, its linguistic and cultural unity, the similarity of its enemies and its success. Old feuds and hostilities would never be forgotten but the political strife of the 17th century certainly created a new bit of common tradition. Finally, by drawing these clans together and displaying their potential to the rest of Britain, as well as to themselves, Montrose made these clans a more serious threat to the establishment in the south. Divided, the clans were merely anachronistic and troublesome; united, they were a real threat.

One related subject should be mentioned here. The existence of this conservative block of clans cannot be denied. The lines that can be drawn from the clans involved in the seven major attempts to restore the Lordship, to the central core of the pro-Stewart clans under Montrose, to the Jacobites of Killiecrankie and the 18th century are clear, but in all the necessary discussion of this conservative faction, it should never be imagined that other Gaels who remained politically and militarily uninvolved or who were hostile to this group were any less committed to their own culture. Their point of view was of course different, but they were still Gaels and recognised as such by the conservative faction who never lost hope for their conversion into Jacobites. This is clearly seen in the mass of 1745 Gaelic "incitement poetry", such as that of the Clan Ranald's Alexander MacDonald in which Campbells, Sutherlands, MacKays and other Hanoverian clans were listed alongside the traditional Jacobite kindreds.<sup>62</sup> As has been seen, there were concrete reasons for this pro-Stewart faction to exist. These forces were strong enough to draw Gaels together despite quite different origins. The men of Atholl, the Clan Ranald,

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62. See below, p.430.



the Stewarts of Appin and the MacGregors were all members of this conservative block for real reasons despite quite different backgrounds and situations. On the other hand, other equally Gaelic people found themselves on the fence or in the opposite camp for equally substantial reasons. The Clan Campbell has been discussed; the Sinclairs, Menzies, Rosses, MacKays, Munros, Sutherlands, Gunns and others were generally hostile. The Grants and Frasers often were divided. Explanation for their stands can be found in a variety of factors such as religion, geography, happier heritable jurisdiction and long standing feuds with members of the pro-Stewart camp. However, despite the reality of these Clans' ties with their own historic culture, there are certain points that are difficult to overlook. The pro-Stewart kindreds were often ex-Lordship members or clans living within the area influenced by the Lordship and both the Lordship and the royal Stewarts were noted for their conservatism. With the exception of the Campbells, none of the opposing clans had ever been closely involved with the Lordship, its tradition, its power and its glory and so were less inclined to view the past with nostalgia. Most of these clans were geographically more separated from the influence of that Lordship and, indeed, of Ireland, and they were often more geographically accessible to Lowland fashion and manipulation. They were also somewhat separated from the west Highland area that bore the brunt of governmental reaction after the Montrose episode and subsequent Jacobite activities. And, finally, with the exception of the Restoration period, they were members of the establishment camp and as such they were not directly put on the defensive culturally or politically.

The royalist plans had gone poorly in the spring and summer of 1644. On 1st February Montrose was appointed lieutenant-general of the king's forces in Scotland. In April he led a predominantly English force into the Borders but withdrew because of a poor reception. On 2nd July the king's north force in England was soundly defeated at Marston Moor and in the north of Scotland John Gordon of Haddo was captured and eventually executed when Argyll led his force into Aberdeenshire against Huntly who retired without a fight. The royalist strategy was a shambles. In July an Irish force under Alasdair MacColla Ciotach MacDonald entered the west of Scotland. Its initial efforts were hardly more auspicious despite a mysterious and, to their foes, a disquieting omen. Patrick Gordon of Ruthven solemnly reported that at the very moment they landed in the Highlands of Scotland a

warneing piece that was shote from heavin as the last and latest signall that should be given was of our neir approacheing punishement; this I am sure the whole kingdome can testifie, since the report that heaven mounted piece of ordnance did ring in the eares of everie man, woman, and child throughout the whole kingdome, as if it had beene levelled and shote at themselves. 63

Gordon went on to explain the omen by saying that when the shot was heard "in all the partes or corners of the kingdoms"<sup>64</sup>

Alexander McDonald landed in the Waste[west] with his Irishes, who ware the first that begane the ware that afterward opened all the waines of the kingdome, and drewe furth oceanes of blood, whereby the vigor and strenth of the Covenant was as much extenuat in one yeare as it gathered strenth in seavin yeares befor. 65

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63. Patrick Gordon, A Short Abridgement of Britane's Distemper, from the Yeare of God MDCXXXIX to MDCXLIX, (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1840), p.6.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

Alasdair was a near kinsman of the Earl of Antrim and the son of MacDonald of Colonsay. The father bore the name Coll Ciotach or Colketto which means "ambidextrous", and the appellation is sometimes erroneously applied to the son. Alasdair's size, strength and martial prowess combined to make him a noted warrior among his fellow Gaels; his skill as a tactician was less worthy of praise. Sir James Turner observed of Alasdair that he was "nae sojer tho stout enough".<sup>66</sup> Like many of his kinsmen, future allies and followers, Alasdair had a score to settle with the Campbells who held his ancestral lands. His small army was primarily made up of Irish with a fair portion of exiled Scottish MacDonalds and MacLeans. The grudge held against the Campbells by these MacDonalds and MacLeans is obvious; it should also be pointed out that most of Alasdair's Irish followers were Antrim's men and that Argyll's principal military follower, Duncan Campbell of Auchinbreck, was currently in Ireland occupying their lands in Antrim with a Campbell force.<sup>67</sup>

After the early capture of three covenanting ships and the castles of Lochaline and Mingarry, the fortunes of this force went as poorly as had the other royal forces throughout the British Isles. Alasdair led his men to Skye to join forces with Sir Donald Gorm MacDonald of Sleat. In the words of Niall MacMhuirich, the Clan Ranald historian, "Antrim's orders were for him [Donald Gorm] to take the command of the army, and to take every man who would raise with them, but Sir Donald [had] died half a year before that".<sup>68</sup> His son, Sir James, the current MacDonald chief of an estimated two thousand

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66. Cowan, op.cit., p.155.

67. Cameron, ed. (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol. II, p.183.

68. Ibid., p.177.

Skye and North Uist warriors, refused the command when Alasdair offered it to him because "he thought the army too small since the whole kingdom was against him, they having only fifteen hundred men".<sup>69</sup> This raises an interesting point. Alasdair's shortcomings as a leader have been fairly pointed out,<sup>70</sup> but it should be remembered that his experience was not as a leader but as one of Antrim's lieutenants and that it seems he never aspired to lead this force. He had hoped to give command to Sir Donald and on learning of the Sleat chief's death offered the position to his son; and, later, after Montrose's identity had been established, Alasdair happily relinquished command to him.

After this set-back on Skye, Alasdair resolved to return to Ireland, but at that moment three covenanting warships happened on his own vessels lying in a Skye loch. All of Alasdair's ships were destroyed or captured. By this action the covenanters had forced Alasdair's hand; "whether he liked it or not",<sup>71</sup> he was now obliged to remain in Scotland and make the best out of a bad situation.

Alasdair despatched one of his Scottish followers, Captain Mortimer, with summonses for the king's army to area chiefs. He dealt with all major area branches of the Clan Donald, including the Clan Ranald, and with the MacLeods, MacNeills, MacLeans and Camerons, but they remained inactive and cautious. As Gordon of Ruthven said, such was "the auefull tyrranie of the great M'Allane [MacCailein Mor], as they could not be brought to the fieldes".<sup>72</sup> Alasdair's force proceeded through the area to Glengarry, "where they got plenty of

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69. Ibid.

70. Cowan, op.cit., p.155.

71. Cameron, ed. (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol. II, p.179.

72. Gordon, op.cit., p.66.



beef for their army, but few people joined them".<sup>73</sup> A few recruits were added from the MacDonnells of Keppoch, and Donald Og Farquharson sent some of his kinsmen from Braemar. Both Huntly and Seaforth were unreceptive and, indeed, Seaforth even appeared hostile. As Alasdair moved south through Badenoch he "threatened the men of that country that if they did not join the King's army they would harm and spoil the country".<sup>74</sup> The king's orders were shown to the leading daoine-uaisle of the area and consequently Alasdair was

joined by Clan Vurich [the MacPhersons] of Badenoch, who were led by a captain and good chieftain of their own blood, namely, Ewan Og, son of Andrew, son of Ewan, who brought 300 men of his own kin with him into the King's army, who were very steadfast in the army while the war continued. <sup>75</sup>

In Atholl the native Clan Duncan (Robertsons) and Stewarts of Atholl viewed the approach of Alasdair's force with alarm and "upon his approach they all went to armes to forbide his passage throw there countray".<sup>76</sup> The Athollmen were loyal to the king but they were mostly protestants and Alasdair's force, made up primarily of Irish and western Catholics, was hardly more welcome than Argyll and his Campbells. To the west of Alasdair lay the force of MacCaillein Mor, to the north were the hostile MacKenzies and Grants and to the south and east lay the Lowlands offering no hope of reinforcements, only the certainty of covenanting armies. Alasdair, doubtless frustrated by his reception in Scotland, felt trapped and resolved to fight there at Truidh Hill in Atholl. Alasdair

feared not death, for he resolved to die nobillie, but it greived him that he sould have brought so

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73. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol. II, p.179.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Gordon, op.cit., p.69.

many brave and hardie men out of there native  
country to be heere, without hope of releife,  
swollowed up by the devoreing sword of these  
enemies. 77

The measure of Alasdair's frustration and hopelessness is seen in his uncharacteristic decision to fight there in Atholl, against a people who were not his traditional foes and who were known royalist, when he could have turned west and at least come to blows with his primary enemy, the Campbells.

In Atholl the two forces, Alasdair's and the combined Robertsons and Stewarts, "stood upon two hilles in battell [ready], and some Badinoch men goeing betwixt them, but could not bring them to an accord".<sup>78</sup> Just before the potentially disastrous battle was joined, Montrose opportunely arrived on the scene in the disguise of a timber merchant<sup>79</sup> and in a few minutes had an army. He immediately "made himselfe knowin to [Alasdair] McDonald".

The joyfull newes of Montrose arrayvall was quickly spread ower all the campe, M'Donald imparteing it to all the captanes and commanders, so they all villingly receaved him, and with a mightie shoute throwes up all there capes in the aire, and with a salvie of a thousandes muscates reportes his welcome throw the cloudes. The armie of Atholle being astonished with such an unexpected storme of thunder and lighteing, betakes them to there armes, and drawes themselves upe in battell expecting a present assault; but when the joyfull newes was brought them of Montrose his arrivall from the king to be leader of those forces, they lykewayes salute him in the same manner when he came to them, and with small difficultie yealdes to aid him with seaven hundreth good men. 80

Under Montrose's able direction the royalist cause in the Highlands rapidly took shape. At the Atholl gathering he wisely wore the trews,

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77. Ibid., p.70.

78. Ibid.

79. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol. II, p.179.

80. Gordon, op.cit., pp.72-73.

shortcoat and bonnet of the Gael and the military record of his ancestors was also pleasing to the Highlanders. The Highlanders whose private rivalries and kin-based pride would seldom permit one of their chiefs to command other kindreds, could serve a man such as Montrose, especially since he held the commission of the king.

Displaying notable discipline for an inexperienced army, Montrose's force was striking successfully at Tippermuir and MacMhuirich says that after the battle the Highlanders were "wealthy and rich".<sup>81</sup> With the exception of this material loss, the citizens of Perth were well treated by the victorious Highlanders and Irish. In mid-September Aberdeen was also taken, but this time with much slaughter. The carnage on the part of Montrose's force was prompted by the murder of their drummer boy-messenger under a flag of truce. Again, the spoils were plenty, one of Alasdair's officers reported that "the riches of that town ... hath made all our soldiers cavaliers".<sup>82</sup> By the first week of October Montrose was back in Atholl after having received some Gordon aid. At this time Alasdair departed for the west Highlands to relieve the garrison he had left in Mingarry that was currently under heavy Campbell attack. Alasdair also hoped to raise the western clans.

In the west events had not waited for Alasdair. Argyll was with the Campbells who were trying to retake Mingarry Castle and during this siege he held an important meeting. In the "Book of Clan Ranald" Niall MacMhuirich reports that John Moydartach met with Argyll. The details of this meeting are not recorded, but MacMhuirich makes Argyll's failure clear; he also demonstrates that the meeting

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81. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol. II, p.177

82. Cowan, op.cit., pp.179-81.



spurred the Clan Ranald to action before the arrival of Alasdair MacColla.

John Moydartach came from Castle Tirim to that camp of MacCailin, at the request of MacCailin, for MacCailin hoped that John Moydartach and the Clanranald would join him in his own army against the kings army. He [John] did not remain long in the camp when he returned and raised all the men of Uist, Eig, Moydart and Arasaig, and the first thing they did was the spoiling of Suinart, leaving neither cow nor sheep in it that they did not carry away to the plains of Castle Tirim; and he sent his son Donald with a part of that prey to the garrison who were in Castle Mingarry. 83

This supports, but does not prove, the Clan Donald contention that John Moydartach's followers raised the Mingarry Castle siege before the arrival of Alasdair, but it also bring up other erroneous points in that study.

In a section totally separated from the Montrose coverage, the Clan Donald authors mention the "spulzie" committed by the men of South Uist against Mr. Martin MacPherson, the minister of that Isle. In this raid MacPherson lost "cow beast of all ages, 80 in number, 88 sheep and lambs, 13 horses, utensils, corn, teinds, &c. to the value of 1067 merks".<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, the exact date of this raid is not known, only that it occurred in 1644. It is likely that the Clan Donald authors are incorrect when they separate this event from the Montrose coverage. MacPherson was a presbyterian minister, doubtless in this period, unwelcomed in catholic South Uist. In the period before 1644 the Clan Ranald had remained reasonably law-abiding and quiet and in that context the raid is difficult to understand. But religious issues were central to the Montrose episode and religion

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83. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol. II, pp.179-81.  
 84. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, p.328.



was almost certainly the cause of this raid. It seems reasonable to assume that this presbyterian minister was visited by the men of South Uist and Benbecula immediately before their departure for the Clan Ranald gathering on the plains of Tioram while the Clan Ranald forces from Moidart and Arisiag raided Sunart. After John Moydartach's meeting with Argyll and his decision to move against the Campbells, the raid on MacPherson is not difficult to understand. The Clan Ranald was then committed to a policy of action, caution no longer the order of the day; it was an excellent time to settle old scores. This interpretation is supported by MacPherson's action immediately after the raid. He fled to the covenanting MacLeods at Dunvegan. In any case, the minister never received compensation from the Clan Ranald for his loss and it was not until 1667 that he was repayed out of the vacant stipends of Skye.<sup>85</sup>

At this point Alasdair seems to have arrived on the scene. MacMhuirich covers his meeting with the Clan Ranald leadership, but leaves the question of who raised the Mingarry siege open. It is possible that the Campbells simply left the area on learning of the dual approach of Alasdair's force and Donald's Clan Ranald force.

Alaster MacColla came down from Montrose to give relief to Castle Mingarry; and Alaster and Donald, son of John Moydartach, met each other there, and they were glad to see each other, for that was their first acquaintance with one another. From thence they came to Castle Tirim, and after having left an exchange of garrison in Castle Mingarry, John Moydartach and themselves proceeded to Arasaig and Morar. 86

The Clan Donald says that "Colonel James Macdonald" had arrived at Mingarry and returned to Montrose with the western force, but while

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85. Ibid.

86. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol. II, p.181.

Colonel MacDonald was one of Alasdair's officers and while he may have been with Alasdair, the "Book of Clan Ranald" clearly shows that Alasdair was present and in charge of the Irish force. Mac-Mhuirich continues to discuss the raising of the western clans:

they sent a message to MacLeod requesting him to come and join the king's army according to his law, but he refused them; and they came to Knoydart, where they met Angus, the grandson of Alaster, and they requested him to join them, but he did not join them at that time. However, Donald Gorm, his father's brother, joined them, and the greater part of the men of Knoydart and of Glengarry. They went forth from the head of Loch Nevis by Clachard to Lochaber and to the Brae, and Donald Glas, the grandson of Ranald, and the men of the Brae [MacDonnells of Keppoch] joined them and the Stewarts of Appin came to them there, and the Clan Ian of Glencoe and the men of Glen Nevis, and all those to the east of Lochy of the Clan Cameron. From thence they went to Athole, where they met the Marquis of Montrose, who was very thankful for that collected army sent to him by John Moydartach 87 to do service for their earthly king. 88

The final line of the above quote is interesting, especially when seen in relation to certain pieces of evidence given by Gordon of Ruthven. Gordon's coverage of the arrival of this west Highland force contains part of that evidence and is also of general interest.

M'Donald [the MacDonald referred to here is Alasdair and not Colonel James as implied in Clan Donald 89] returns back to him [Montrose] and brings M'Allan (wickeime) of some called the captaine of the clane Ranald, one of the greatest men amongst the clane Donald. This man brought with him eight hundreth of the strongest and most waiiant highlanderess, weell armed with habershoes, muriones and targates; for offensive armes they had gunes, bowes, swords and axes, called of some Lochaber aixes. 90

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87. My italics.

88. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.181.

89. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, p.329.

90. Gordon, op.cit., p.94.

The Clan Donald incorrectly identifies this 800 man force as "the Clanranald force",<sup>91</sup> but as has been seen it included the men of Knoydart, Glengarry, Keppoch, a few of the men of Sleat under MacDonald of Castleton, the Camerons, the Stewarts of Appin and the MacDonalds of Glencoe as well as the Clan Ranald. This passage is of considerable interest for several reasons. First, this represents still another example of the existence of the conservative block of west Highland kindreds. The clans that were brought in by John Moydartach were the central core of this important Highland faction and the Montrose episode is perhaps the best documented instance of their highly unified approach to area developments. It was no accident that from 1644 to 1746 every one of these clans was involved in every major action in support of the conservative Stewarts. Secondly, considering that this west Highland force was comprised of seven highly martial kindreds, its total number of warriors was not great. This fact, and Gordon's interesting description of them as "eight hundreth of the strongest and most wailiant highlanderes, weell armed", indicates that this army was collected in the old way. It was comprised primarily of the daoin-uisle of each clan, the warrior aristocracy of Gaeldom, and not, as was the case in later Jacobite risings, of the area's full numerical potential. It might also suggest that, as had been the case in 1545, when the might of the Lordship gathered in Ireland at Knockfergus around Donald Dubh, a substantial number of warriors had been left in the west Highlands to guard against the serious possibility of retaliatory Campbell raids into their homelands now stripped of manpower and weakened. In fact,

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91. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol.II, p.329.



the Jesuit priest, James MacBreck, in his report to Rome, says that the Campbells had already on several occasions been involved in raids on their enemies and that the Campbells had driven "their prey [cattle] off to their own land of Argyll".<sup>92</sup> In another section of the report MacBreck says:

The Campbells must be thoroughly intimidated, and their asylum reached and overthrown, or else there would never be any safety in any part of the Highlands. The King's subjects would not flock to his standard or accept his service if these assassins, always ready to rush out from their hiding places for murder and booty, were not hunted down in their strongholds and dens of crime. 93

The third reason for the above passage's interest is that when Gordon of Ruthven described John Moydartach, he said, "This man brought with him..." and here MacMhuirich's words should also be remembered; he said that Montrose was "very thankful for that collected army sent to him by John Moydartach". Both statements are clear; Alasdair had been in the area to raise the clans, but these conservative kindreds had been raised and were led by John Moydartach and John had started his mobilization well before Alasdair's arrival. Clearly, studies that refer to this force as "Alasdair's eight hundred Gaels"<sup>94</sup> are in error and from a Highland perspective seriously in error. Alasdair's importance to this era is certainly not denied, but every piece of documentation relating to this particular section of Montrose's army indicates that it was raised and led by the Captain of Clan Ranald. True, the situation had not been created by him, but given the state of affairs created by Montrose and Alasdair, John Moydartach

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92. William Forbes-Leith, Memoirs of Scottish Catholics during the XVII and XVIII Centuries, vol. I, (London, 1909), pp.287 & 304.

93. Ibid., p.307.

94. Cowan, op.cit., p.173.



appears also to have been central.

This interpretation is supported by certain other pieces of evidence. Argyll had earlier felt the need to deal with John Moydartach personally; he may have met with other area chiefs but if so these meetings are unrecorded. In the negotiations that took place following the entry of this west Highland force to Montrose's army, John Moydartach played a central role and he appears to have been the spokesman for all the western clans. It should be remembered that this particular evidence for the importance of the Clan Ranald chief does not come from the expected and possibly biased MacMhuirich source, but from the memoirs of Gordon of Ruthven. Gordon says that John "resolves that, unless the generall [Montrose] make this his first work to enter upon the Campbells and the wholle countres of Ardgyl, they would goe no forder on, but would againe retyre unto there countrie".<sup>95</sup> John's position is also seen when he, along with Montrose and Alasdair, led one of the three royalist columns through Argyll in the descent on Inverary; John Moydartach, of course, led the west Highland section of the army. Finally, given the above evidence, it appears reasonable to remember the words of John Moydartach in his 1626 letter to the Pope. In this letter he said he would lead a crusade against the "turbulent, detested followers of Calvin".<sup>96</sup> Given his demonstrated predominance in 1644 and the Clan Ranald's traditional position of importance among these western kindreds, his 1626 claims do not appear overly boastful.

This Captain of the Clan Ranald was not a mere member of the conservative block of western clans in 1644; he was its leader.

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95. Gordon, op.cit., p.94.

96. Campbell, The Letter, op.cit., p.113.

This shows that despite the claims of numerous authors, this particular group of clans shared such similar outlooks that they would and did follow the leadership of one of their members. Indeed, in this situation the leadership of John Moydartach appears to have been instrumental. The geographically separated MacPhersons of Badenoch, the Clan Chattan and the Athollmen were much less likely to follow this leadership, but if specific west Highland clans had a heritage of unity, they also had similar situations and objectives. Unity had been central to the Lordship and it was often displayed in the long series of risings that attempted to restore the Lordship. Unity was also evidenced on a smaller scale in the Blair na Leine episode. In 1644 it was displayed again. And one issue that was central to this collection of Highland people was the "injuries and tyranus oppression" of the Clan Campbell. They lost no time in making this clear to Montrose at a council of war.

Winter approached and Montrose proposed spending it in the Lowlands, but immediately faced an internal crisis over this issue. The west Highland contingent that John Moydartach had just brought to the royal army baulked. Before they had done any service to Montrose and before they would follow him against any other objective, they demanded that he deal with their old enemy, the Clan Campbell. A recent study has said of this situation, "Montrose's one thought was to leave the hill country for the Lowlands, but Alasdair offered a startling ultimatum".<sup>97</sup> This is incorrect. "Ultimatum" it was, but Alasdair was not the man who delivered it. The most specific mention of Alasdair concerning this topic occurs in Father MacBreck's letter.

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97. Cowan, op.cit., p.174.

In this account MacBreck says, "The catholic regiments, however, and their leader, Alexander MacDonald, longed earnestly to fight it out with the Campbells".<sup>98</sup> It is true that Alasdair strongly supported the attack on Argyll. MacMhuirich and Gordon both agree with MacBreck on this point, but MacBreck's above statement does not mention any ultimatum. And, in any case, MacBreck's information was second-hand and he is often a poor and confused source from the Gaelic perspective. In fact, he even goes so far as to claim, quite incorrectly, that both the Clan Duncan (the Robertsons) and the MacNabbs were actually MacDonalds.<sup>99</sup> He is continually guilty of such errors and oversimplification and often seems to try wrongly to reduce Highland history to a catholic MacDonald versus presbyterian Campbell feud. In the above quoted statement Father MacBreck also makes a mistake that is still common; he assumes Alasdair led all of the Gaels in this royal army. Alasdair led the Irish and he had a major influence on all the involved Gaels, but as has been shown, he did not lead the west Highland contingent. His ally and kinsman, John Moydartach, led this partly catholic force. In any case Alasdair was in no position to offer ultimatums. He had no ships. He was cut off from his home in Ireland and had already seen how strongly he needed Montrose. The west Highland force under the Captain of Clan Ranald found itself in quite another situation. It was not cut off from its home base and consequently was in a position to put ultimatums. John Moydartach, speaking for the assembled western clans, was the man who offered the ultimatum to Montrose, and Gordon of Ruthven, in his full account of this meeting, makes this quite clear. Gordon said that Montrose:

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98. Forbes-Leith, op.cit., p.306.

99. Cowan, op.cit., p.175, and Forbes-Leith, op.cit., pp.308-09.



thought it fitte to retire to the law countree, but M'Allane (wickeane), [John Moydartach] with all the clane Donald [and the other western clans] had such a mynd to revenge the injuries and tyranus oppression wherewith Ardgyl, more then any of his predecessoures, had ensulted ower them, resolves that, unless the generall make this his first work to enter upon the Campbells and the wholle countree of Ardgyl, they would go no forder on, but would againe retyre unto there cuntree. 100

This "M'Allane (wickeane,)" was previously described by Gordon as "M'Allan (wickeane) of some called the captaine of the clane Ranald".<sup>101</sup>

The west Highlanders drove a hard bargain at this council of war and this single mindedness on their part is highly significant. This study takes the position that these Gaels were never a collection of simple-minded puppets always ready blindly to serve the royal Stewarts. This erroneous and damaging point of view has been accepted and perpetuated for far too long.<sup>102</sup> While these Highlanders were sincere in their loyalty to the Stewarts, they also had other solid (and related) reasons for supporting this dynasty. In 1644 the Campbells were particularly obnoxious to this west Highland faction and they clearly saw Montrose and Alasdair as presenting a golden opportunity simultaneously to support the King of Scots and to settle accounts with Clan Campbell; indeed, it should be remembered that while certain kindreds from the central Highlands had already fought under Montrose, this newly arrived west Highland force demanded that the Campbells be the army's next and their first target. Only if this condition were met, would they follow Montrose against other royalist

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100. Gordon, op.cit., p.94.

101. Ibid.

102. John Prebble is perhaps the best example of this approach in his trilogy, "Destruction of the Clans".



enemies.

It has been shown that this west Highland animosity towards the Clan Campbell was long-standing and on the increase, but the journal of Father MacBreck contains a further piece of information that may help to explain the especially virulent anti-Campbell feelings of 1644. It is well known that the Campbells had been raiding throughout the centre of Scotland in this period. They had devastated the people in Atholl and even the Ogilvie lands in Angus,<sup>103</sup> but MacBreck states that the western Highlands also received Campbell attention. He says that the Campbells

had carried flame and havoc into the north [MacBreck like many others simply feels the Highlands are in the north and the Lowlands in the south] not after a declaration of war, but solely because they themselves had taken the Covenant. They not only burnt the house of Macranald, the Catholic chief whom I have mentioned, but even his orchard, leaving no trace of human habitation on the spot. 104

"Macranald" is certainly the title MacBreck gave John Moydartach in his journal, but this point remains somewhat confusing. This Campbell raid on the Clan Ranald is not mentioned in the "Book of Clan Ranald", but this does not prove that MacBreck was wrong. There are several possibilities: the raid may never have occurred; MacBreck may have simply mistaken John Moydartach for another unnamed Highland chief; or, if the raid did occur as MacBreck alleges, perhaps MacMhuirich saw the successful Campbell attack on the Clan Ranald as a humiliating military reverse and simply chose not to mention it. This is possible; Argyll was in the area with a Campbell force at the Mingarry Castle siege. Perhaps after his unsuccessful meeting

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103. Cowan, op.cit., pp.94-96.

104. Forbes-Leith, op.cit., pp.304-05.

with John Moydartach, Argyll did order a raid into John's "rough bounds". This could help to explain many things, such as John's resolute mobilization of the Clan Ranald before Alasdair's return to the area (and this firm action after his earlier notable caution when Alasdair had first been in the area dealing with Sir James MacDonald of Sleat and trying to raise other area clans). It would explain John's central role in raising and leading the western clans and the fact that these clans did take such resolute action at this point and not during Alasdair's previous visit; John's role as spokesman for the western clans and his demand for immediate action against the Campbells at the council of war; his leadership of one of the three royalist columns in the descent on Inverary; and his solid attachment to the cause thereafter. In a more general context it should also be noted that if MacCaillein Mor and his kindred had raided as far north as Moidart, then the Camerons, the MacDonalds of Glencoe, the Stewarts of Appin and the MacDonnells of Glengarry and Keppoch would also have been likely recipients of Campbell attention. Again, given the inconclusive nature of the documentation and especially MacMhuirich's silence, this must remain speculation but, given the certainty of the fierce and sudden anti-Campbell feelings in 1644 on the part of John Moydartach and his west Highland allies, given the well recorded and aggressive Campbell tactics of the period throughout Scotland and given MacBreck's clear statement, this is not idle speculation.

After John's ultimatum the council of war continued with Montrose pointing out the difficulty of the proposed Argyll campaign and with John Moydartach, Alasdair MacColla and others urging its adoption. As will be seen, while Alasdair did not offer the ultimatum to Montrose, he was strongly in favour of the proposed attack on the

Campbells. Indeed, given the presence of the catholic priests, the Ogilvies, the Robertsons and Stewarts of Atholl, Alasdair and his Irish as well as John Moydartach and his west Highland allies in Montrose's army, every member of this group holding strong and recently kindled feelings of hatred for the Campbells, Montrose gives the impression not of a brilliant tactician and military commander but of a leader following his "followers".

Gordon of Ruthven reports that Montrose told the assembly that Argyll was separated from the rest of Scotland by a continued "rigge of high craigie and inaccessible montaines" and that the only way in were a few passes that could be held by 500 against 20,000. The army could not pass Glenorchy without raising the alarm and that if the Campbells "ware of but ordinairie witte and policie" they would "cutte of[f] from them all provision" and "bloke them upe in the waist bouelles of those desertes till famyne had consumed them every man". Montrose added that if "by Godes assistance" they should surmount those problems that once in Argyll the terrain was divided in many peninsulas by ranges of mountains, lochs and arms of the sea "like the teeth of a combe" that this would hamper their progress and aid their enemies. Alasdair answered Montrose that the mountains and passes were known to them and that they knew the Campbells to be "of a shallow and blunt disposition, haveing neither braines to forsee the danger nor judgement to apprehend what was fitting for resistance". Alasdair continued by saying that Argyll had never been successfully invaded before because of these difficulties and consequently the Campbells were too confident and unaware, and that once inside Argyllshire Montrose

should find the people sleeping in a caireless securitie, or being assured that the great M'Allan [MacCailein Mor] was so wise as to forsee



all danger, and so mightie to oppose it, that they know not what it is to stand in feare of any invasion, and there securite, from age to age, was one of the maine reasones which had made that people in generall become so stupid and doltish. 105

The Highlanders then brought in Angus MacAllan Dubh, a duin-ualsal from the MacDonalds of Glencoe. No kindred in the Highlands was more expert than the MacIains of Glencoe in the craft of lifting Campbell cattle. Montrose asked Angus if he knew the passes into Argyll, if he knew "the countries of MacCailin" inside Argyll and if the army could hope for provision in winter there. Angus answered that

there was not a town under the lordship of MacCailin but was known to him, and that if watertight houses, and fat cattle as victuals to feed upon in them would answer their purpose, that they would procure them for them. 106

Alasdair continued by observing that the Campbells "had long been the fiercest persecutors and, whenever they could, the murderers and assassins of the Catholics, in the north of Ireland and the whole of Scotland".<sup>107</sup> The anti-Campbell faction felt the entire conduct of the war turned on this single point. It was pointed out that the king's loyal subjects could never rise and rally to his standard while they feared that the Campbells "these assassins, [were] always ready to rush out from their hiding places for murder and booty".<sup>108</sup> Only if the Campbells in Argyll "this hideous receptacle of bandits, plunderers, incendiaries and cut-throats" were crushed would the many loyal Highlanders feel free to leave their homes and families unprotected and serve the king. The catholic priests believed Argyll was

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105. Gordon, op.cit., pp.95-96.

106. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.181.

107. Forbes-Leith, op.cit., p.306.

108. Ibid., p.307.



the only area of Scotland where catholic missionaries had not penetrated since the Reformation and they saw the whole affair as a crusade.<sup>109</sup> Alasdair, John Moydartach and the rest of the anti-Campbell faction carried the day and these Gaelic leaders, with their resolute followers, much more than Montrose, carried their wrath throughout the lands of MacCaillein Mor. And, as has been said, ever after, the proud Campbell boast, "it's a far cry to Lochawe", would sound very hollow.<sup>110</sup>

The next day found the royal army marching south from Atholl through Rannoch and burning through the Menzies lands around Aberfeldy and on into the Campbell district of Breadalbane. There the army split and both sides of Lochtay were wasted "with fyre and sword ... Campbells fleeing befor them to strongholds".<sup>111</sup> Although winter was upon them, it was already December, the army advanced quickly; its Highland and Irish troops in their element. However, at one of the most important passes into Argyll the army found itself at an impasse. The defile lay

betwixt two high and rockie montaines, the oppin or space betwixt them being filled up with a lairge and deepe laike, betwixt the craigie mountaine and the laike. On the one hand was a narrow passage, cute furth of the rocke; and within the laike, upon a strong and high rocke, there stood a strong and weell fortified castell, within a pistoll shotte of land. This fortress was weell maned [by Campbells], and they had an abundance of wictuall and some munition and weell mounted ordinances. They could, at there pleasure, cute doune, rent, teire, and massacre all that should offer to come that way, without any danger or prejudice that could be done to them. 112

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109. Ibid., pp.307-09.

110. Cowan, op.cit., p.175.

111. Gordon, op.cit., p.96.

112. Ibid.

There at the head of Lochdochart and the base of Ben Mor the army and the campaign were stalled. Montrose's earlier doubts had obviously been well founded but at this crisis MacCailein Mor's own policy of expansion and aggression came back to haunt him and his kindred. This area had been the ancient home of the Clan MacNabb and despite having lost their feudal charters to the Campbells, this native kindred continued to reside in the area under Campbell control. Like many other kindreds living under the heel of MacCailein Mor, the MacNabbs were theoretically loyal supporters of Argyll, their superior, but in reality the Campbells were not kin: the MacNabbs saw the Campbells as unwelcomed outsiders and oppressors. They clearly desired the opportunity to strike out against their Campbell overlords; and, just as Father MacBreck, Alasdair and John Moydartach had promised Montrose in the council of war, the royalist campaign into Argyll freed these MacNabbs and others, simultaneously to defy their Campbell oppressors and support the king.

The MacNabb chief accompanied by "twalfe or saxteine" of his followers came to Montrose's camp and offered their services to the Marquis. Montrose said that in return for "a piece of service" the MacNabbs would find that he would maintain and reward as well as restore the MacNabbs to their former lands. The service was of course the capture of the castle in the loch. After an "adwysement" or a discussion amongst themselves, the MacNabbs approached the shore near the castle.

They call to the Castell, showeing who they ware,  
and desyreing to shute the bote, and send it to  
them, because they had something to impart that  
concerned them, and they had letters from M'Allane-  
more[MacCailein Mor] to the garisone. Misdoubting  
nothing from their owne countray people, as being  
all sevrantes to one lord [feudal], sends there

boite ashore and bringes them in. . They are no sooner landed at the castell when they kill such as resistes, taken the captaine and some otheres in there beddes. 113

So in less than an hour the MacNabbs had secured the castle and given it up to Montrose. In return for this service Montrose returned the castle to them (anciently it had been a MacNabb stronghold) and all the lands belonging to it.

In this manner all of Argyllshire was laid open to the royal invaders. When Argyll, in Edinburgh, heard of the invasion he was greatly pleased. He saw this as an excellent opportunity to trap his enemies in one of his treacherous passes and destroy them. He hurried off to Inverary to finish the job. As the royal army quickly burned its way down Glenorchy, it won a great amount of spoil and here the Clan Gregor, yet another victim of Campbell expansion, rallied to the standard. Argyll, only recently arrived at his castle of Inverary, soon received the disturbing news that the royal force was already advancing down Glen Shirra and that he, not Montrose, was in danger of becoming trapped. In his waiting galley, he hurried off down Loch Fyne leaving his kindred leaderless to face the wrath of their assembled foes.

Meanwhile, at Loch Awe, the royal force had divided and John Moydartach led his west Highland contingent in a great raid as far as Kilmartin in Glassary to the estate of Duncan Campbell of Auchinbreck. The sources, with the exception of MacMhuirich's "Book of Clan Ranald", simply refer to John's force as being comprised of "MacDonalds",<sup>114</sup> but here MacMhuirich must be accepted as the more knowledgeable. Unlike Father MacBreck, he knew the Robertsons and MacNabbs were not

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113. Ibid., p.97.

114. Ibid., p.98, and Forbes-Leith, op.cit., pp.306-09.



MacDonalds and unlike Gordon of Ruthven, he was often careful enough, and Gael enough, to list specifically those comprising John's force. Indeed, he was so conscientious in this approach that at one point when discussing the arrival of Angus MacDonnell, Chief of the Glengarry clan, he said, "Angus, son of the son of Alister, laird of Glengarry [came to them]; but the men of MacAlaster's son were always in the army".<sup>115</sup> This special care in accurately listing those involved in various parts of these events is important in understanding the Gaelic perspective and useful in reconstructing these events. The Highlanders saw themselves not simply as a useful mass of nameless wild hill people, but as an alliance of recognised and respected kindreds. It was of central importance to them to be acknowledged for the part their own clan played and if certain modern historians are disinclined to take the trouble to list accurately the Gaelic participants in these events, it must be remembered that the Clan Ranald bard, Niall MacMhuirich, made the importance of this approach to the Gaels themselves quite clear.

MacMhuirich had earlier said that in John's force were the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald and Glencoe, the MacDonnells of Keppoch, Knoydart and Glengarry, the Clan Cameron and the Stewarts of Appin. When John's force separated from the royal army in Argyll, MacMhuirich says, "John Moydartach and his own party and the men of the Brae were sent in a separate direction from the other part of the army to make a preying throughout the country".<sup>116</sup> There is some confusion here when MacMhuirich mentions "the men of the Brae" because he has earlier used that designation to refer to both the MacDonnells of Keppoch and

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115. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.181.

116. Ibid.

the Athollmen, but since the men of Keppoch were earlier, and throughout the period, listed as being a part of John's force, here Mac-Mhuirich must be referring to the Robertsons and Stewarts of Atholl.

So when Gordon of Ruthven says of the raid that the country was

consumed with fire; for although out of a generous and merciefull disposition he [Montrose] would have spared the people, yet the clane Donald wheresoever they found any that was able to cary armes, did without mercie, dispatch them. 117

he is actually saying that John's followers, the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald, Knoydart, Glengarry, Keppoch and Glencoe as well as the Clan Cameron, the Stewarts of Appin and Atholl and the Clan Robertson, along with Alasdair's Irish, all took part in these anti-Campbell excesses.

In this great raid John Moydartach and his followers sacked the Campbell estates of Auchinbreck, Lochnell and Barbreck and returned to Montrose driving a thousand cattle; they left "not ane four footed beist in the haill lands, and sic as would not call they hochit and slew".<sup>118</sup> Throughout Argyll all armed Campbells were put to death and the invaders "did not desist until they had hunted every man fit for service out of the country, or driven them into secret lurking holes". The town of Inverary was put to the torch as were Campbell dwellings throughout Argyll. In this manner Alasdair earned the proud title fear thollaidh nan tighean or "the man who holed the houses". But while the slaughter and destruction was wide-spread, it was not indiscriminate. One of the major objectives of the campaign had been to relieve the Campbell pressure on potentially royalist Argyllshire kindreds and Father James MacBreck

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117. Gordon, op.cit., p.98.

118. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.183.

shows that this policy was carried out and that non-Campbell Argyllshire people were spared.

The houses of the rebels [Campbells and their allies] were burnt in just reprisals of war, but clemency was extended to the people scattered among the Campbells, who had been drawn into the iniquitous Covenant, not by any will of their own, but by an authority which they were powerless to resist. 119

The royal army rested in Argyll "where they hade abundance of cues, sheip and other provision for the armie, but little drinks, except cold water".<sup>120</sup> The dreams of the priests were also realised when mass was heard throughout the country of MacCaillein Mor "for the first time since the churches were destroyed by the madness of the Calvinists".<sup>121</sup>

After celebrating a bountiful Christmas in the heart of Argyll the royal army departed along the west coast through Nether Lorne. Again the force had been divided as it moved northwards and, as before, "whan they removed from one point to ane other, they burnt what they leaft behind them".<sup>122</sup> After passing the difficult ford at Loch Etive with the aid of the Prior of Ardchattan, the army, finally out of Campbell country, halted for a "joyful" and amply supplied festival.<sup>123</sup>

Moving from Argyll through the friendly countries of Appin and Glencoe, Montrose's force hesitated at Inverlochy. While resting at the medieval fortress there, Sir Lauchlan MacLean of Duart, along with thirty of his special daoin-uaisle, including the MacLean chieftains

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119. Forbes-Leith, op.cit., p.309.

120. Gordon, op.cit., p.98.

121. Forbes-Leith, op.cit., p.309.

122. Gordon, op.cit., p.98.

123. Forbes-Leith, op.cit., p.311.



of Lochbuie, Coll, Kinlochaline, Ardgour, Kingairloch and Treshnish, joined the royal army. Here, too, a contingent of the Camerons of Lochail were sent to the army by their elderly chief, Allan MacDonald Dubh Cameron. Despite the earlier involvement of other members of the Clan Cameron, old Allan had remained cautious because his grandson, Ewen, was being fostered by Argyll. Both MacLean of Duart and Cameron of Lochail had been impressed by the recent success of the royal army in Argyll and both doubtless felt more inclined to follow their consciences and act now that the great MacCailein Mor and his Clan Campbell had been so thoroughly chastised on their own ground.

From Inverlochy the force moved up the Great Glen with Inverness as its possible target, but soon found itself wedged between Seaforth with his collection of northern clans who were advancing down from Inverness and Argyll who had just occupied Inverlochy with a hastily gathered force of his own. This Campbell mobilization had been aided by the arrival of Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchinbreck who had just returned from Ireland where he had commanded Argyll's forces in Antrim. The "Book of Clan Ranald" reports that Auchinbreck, "seized with fury and rage on finding his estate burnt and plundered", helped Argyll to gather "the Clan Campbell numerously and extensively mustered, and they went in the track of that army of Montrose".<sup>124</sup>

At a council of war it was decided that Argyll represented the greater danger because from his present base in Lochaber he could strike not only at the rear of the royal army, but also into the unprotected homelands of the western kindreds, including the lands of Keppoch, Glengarry, Lochail, Appin, Glencoe, as well as the Clan

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124. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.183.

Ranald's own "rough bounds". There is also evidence indicating that Seaforth had been dealing with the royalist commander and if so Montrose would have been disinclined to force a confrontation with a potential ally.<sup>125</sup> Montrose's force turned back again, notably, choosing to move against the Campbells. At first glance the royal army seemed trapped there in the Great Glen between the two covenanting armies, but despite the predicament, Montrose did not falter. He led his men up into the snow covered hills in one of military history's most impressive winter marches and when the royalists descended from the dangerous mountain passes a day and a half later their vanguard was able to surprise a few of Argyll's raiders who were burning houses and food stores on Keppoch's lands. Several of these marauding Campbells were killed, but a few escaped to Inverlochy with word of the enemy's surprising approach. So, while Argyll had not expected this development, his force was not totally unprepared for the next day's battle.

The Battle of Inverlochy was probably the high point of the entire Montrose episode for the conservative clans. On 2nd February 1645, these Gaels were able to come to grips with their assembled foes, led by Argyll and his Sliochd Diarmaid, the Clan Campbell, in full battle. On the royalist side stood most of the surviving clans of the traditional west Highland camp: the MacDonald contingents of Clan Ranald, Glengarry, Keppoch and Glencoe, plus the Clan Cameron and the Stewarts of Appin. Added to this force were Gaels of the central and eastern Highlands such as the MacPhersons and a few Farquharsons of the Clan Chattan and the Athollmen - Stewarts and Robertsons. Moreover, as had been predicted, several clans with conservative out-

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125. Cowan, op.cit., p.181.

looks who had previously remained inactive under Argyll's heel, now felt able to act; these included MacNabbs, Lamonts, MacLachlans, MacDougalls, MacNaughtons, some MacLeans and some MacGregors. The Irish and Scottish exiles who followed Alasdair MacColla also had scores to settle with the Sliochd Diarmaid. It has been rightly said that the rout at Inverlochy "transcended the struggle between king and covenant".<sup>126</sup> Under Montrose's banner stood Scots and Irish, Lowlanders and Highlanders, and those Scottish Gaels included catholics, episcopalians and other protestants who were not presbyterian or episcopalian but who were in favour of the episcopacy.

Archibald Campbell, the Marquis of Argyll, had received minor injuries in a fall and on the morning of the battle chose to rest in safety on his ship in the adjacent Loch Linnhe. With Argyll's absence his force was commanded by the able Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchinbreck. This covenanting army was mostly comprised of Campbell clansmen with their followers and also six companies of Lowlanders from Leven's regiment. Their royalist opponents only numbered about 1500 because sections of the Clan Ranald, the Farquharsons and the Athollmen had returned to their homelands with booty recently won in Argyll.

Montrose personally led the centre of the royalist army. He chose to lead a purely Highland force against the Campbell centre. In this section stood the men of Clan Ranald, Glengarry, Glencoe, the Camerons, the MacLeans, the Athollmen and the Stewarts of Appin. Alasdair's force made up the left wing and Manus O'Cahan led the right.

The battle was joined soon after the sun rose and after putting up a good initial fight, "with great bravery" (Montrose's own words),

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126. Ibid., p.183.



the Campbells broke. Soon the battle was a blood-soaked rout. Many fleeing Campbells were cut down as they ran; few received quarter. Many covenanters were trapped and killed on the banks of the Nevis River and others were drowned as they tried to cross. The Lowlanders of Leven's regiment were quicker to surrender than their luckless Campbell allies and were treated with some leniency. It has been estimated that 1500 of Argyll's force lost their lives that day.

Iain Lom MacDonnell, the bard of the MacDonnells of Keppoch, observed the battle from a neighbouring hill and he has left a powerful poem to the victory.

Have you heard of the heroic countermarch made by  
the army that was at Kilcumin. Far has gone the  
fame of their play - they drove their enemies  
before them.

Early on Sunday morning I climbed the brae above  
the castle of Inverlochy. I saw the army array-  
ing for battle, and victory on the field was with  
Clan Donald.

...

I declare to you [Campbell] Laird of Lawers,  
although loudly you boast in your sword, many a  
young warrior of your father's kin is lying at  
Inverlochy.

...

Many a [Campbell] warrior with helmet and bow  
and slender straight musket lay stretched at  
Inverlochy, and the darling of the women of  
Kintyre was among them.

The most pleasing news every time it was  
announced about the wry-mouth Campbells, was  
that every company of them as they came along  
had their heads battered with sword blows.

On the day when they thought success would be  
theirs, heroes were pursuing them on frozen  
ground; many a great sallow-skinned sloucher  
lay on the surface of Ach an Todhair.

...

You engaged in a hot foray round Lochy,  
smiting them on the noses. Numerous are the  
blue-fluted well-balanced swords that were

wielded in the hands of Clan Donald.

When the great work of blood-letting came to a height at the time of unsheathing slender swords, the claws of the Campbells lay on the ground with sinews severed.

Numerous are the naked unclothed bodies which lie stretched on Cnoc an Fhraoich, right from the battlefield on which the heroes were urged onwards to the far end of Leitir Blar a' Chaorainn.

...

John of Moidart of the bright sails [John Moydartach], who would sail the seas on a dark day, you were not found guilty of breaking your tryst; it pleases me that you have [Campbell of] Barbreck in your power.

...

Alasdair of the sharp cleaving blades, you promised yesterday to destroy them; you directed the rout past the castle, an excellent plan for keeping in touch with them.

Alasdair of the sharp venomous blades, had you had the heroes of Mull [the full Clan MacLean], those of them who escaped you would have been induced to stay, when the dulse-eating rabble was in retreat.

Alasdair, son of handsome Coll, expert at breaking castles asunder, you routed the sallow-skinned Lowlanders, and if they had drunk kail you knocked it out of them.

Were you familiar with Goirtean Odhar? Well it was manured, not by the dung of sheep or goats, but by the blood of Campbells after it had congealed.

Perdition take you if I feel pity for your plight, as I listen to the distress of your children, lamenting the company which was in the battlefield, the wailing of the women of Argyll.

In this poem, entitled "La Inbhir Lochaidh" or "The Battle of Inverlochy", Iain Lom is clearly depicting this engagement as a MacDonald versus Campbell conflict, but in another of his poems, "Soraidh Do'n Ghramach" or "A Song of Greeting to Montrose", Iain Luim gave a more complete list of those who rallied to Montrose and who shared equally with the Clan Donald this great victory.

When you settled accounts you paid double measure;  
on your side were MacLean, the men of Atholl and  
Clan Chattan.

These would rise with you, no matter who should  
resent it, the Lamonts, the MacLauchlans and all  
who are allied to them; the descendents of  
Ilpin and Alpin [the MacGregors], John Stewart  
from Appin, and MacNabb from Glendochart.

Clan Donald equipped with scapulars, banners  
and bows, mail armour, helmets and regal head-  
gear, and sharp grey blades with which battles are  
brought to an end, the cause of your complaint was  
that they sold away your king.

...

I do not like the soothsaying Earl's confident  
assertion that you have lost the finest tooth of  
all the set: an excellent rider of a battle  
steed who would not fail [to obey] the command:  
a valiant hand which did not falter was his [Lord  
Gordon's] who fell in the battle of Alford. 127

On the other side the Campbells have been equally eloquent in  
expressing their feelings. Most of this Campbell comment is devoted  
to expressions of grief or telling observations on the shortcomings  
of their own chief, MacCailein Mor, Archibald Campbell, the Marquis  
of Argyll. Twice now this man had abandoned his kindred, fled by  
sea and allowed his own kin to face the wrath of their traditional  
enemies without his leadership. True, Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchin-  
breck had been left in charge and he was an experienced soldier, but  
he was not chief; he was not MacCailein Mor. Throughout Scottish  
history, from Bannockburn to Killiecrankie, Gaels have often mirrored  
the performance of their leaders. The effect on the Campbell morale  
at Inverlochy when their own clan chief again fled should not be  
overlooked. Indeed, Robert Menteith of Salmonet said that the loss  
"much diminished Argyll's credit among his own followers, to whom

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127. Anne M. MacKenzie, ed., Oran Iain Luim, Songs of John MacDonald  
Bard of Keppoch, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, for the Scottish  
Gaelic Text Society, 1964), pp.20-28 & 30.



this day was very fatal because it broke the band wherewith he kept those poor Highlanders attached to his interest".<sup>128</sup> Campbell of Skipness accused his chief of cowardice and Montrose himself records that the prisoners laid "all the blame on their chief".<sup>129</sup> But the most moving of all the Campbell condemnations of MacCailein Mor is found in the bitter poem to Duncan Campbell of Glenfaochain who fell in the battle. The lament was composed by Glenfaochain's widow.

O, I am sorely wounded since the day of the Battle of Inverlochy. The Irishmen's onset was searing, they who came to Scotland empty handed, who owned not even a cloak; they gave mettle to Clan Donald.

They slew my father and my husband and my three fine young sons; my four brothers hewn asunder, and my nine comely foster-brothers.

O, I am spent on account of Campbell of Glenfaochain. Every man in this land weeps for you; here and there about Inverary women wring their hands, their hair dishevelled.

O, I am despoiled on account of the rider of bridled and pillioned horses who fell in battle with his followers. Great MacCailein took himself off to sea, and he let this stroke fall on his kin. 130

Despite a narrow escape while plundering Dundee, the royalist campaign continued with other notable successes. On 9th May a covenanting army under Lieutenant-Colonel John Hurry closed with Montrose at Auldearn just east of Nairn. Hurry's force included Campbells under Sir Mungo Campbell of Lawers, MacKenzies under George MacKenzie, the 2nd Earl of Seaforth, Sutherlands and Gunns under John Gordon, the 7th Earl of Sutherland, and Inneses, Rosses, Munros, Frasers, Dunbars, MacIntoshes and several other northern kindreds. In this battle the Clan Ranald with the rest of the Clan Donald

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128. Forbes-Leith, Scottish Catholic, op.cit., p.322.

129. Cowan, op.cit., p.186.

130. Ibid.

followed Alasdair and saw heavy action. The "Book of Clan Ranald" records:

The bold and warlike clan of the MacDonalds and of the truly fierce, very brave, powerfully spirited band of the Clanranald, forced the enemy manfully and bravely without the fear or terror of strokes or shots. 131

Auldearn, a clear victory for the royalists, saw heavy covenanting losses. The MacKenzies, Frasers and, again, the Campbells bore the brunt of this carnage.

The next battle occurred at Alford on 2nd June and it took place without Alasdair who was away in the west Highlands again raising the clans. Since Inverlochy many Highlanders had drifted away from the royal army feeling the need to check on their unprotected families, crops and possessions and also to deposit captured booty. A substantial portion of the original Clan Ranald contingent had returned to the west for these reasons, but the section that remained with Montrose fought at Alford in the centre of the royalist army with some Glengarry MacDonnells, the MacPhersons, a number of Stewarts and Robertsons from Atholl and a mixture of the remaining mixed clans. As usual, Montrose's force was not large, but for a change neither was that of his adversary, General William Baillie of Letham. Argyll was also among the covenanting commanders. Again, the result was a hard fought but lopsided victory for Montrose; the success at Alford was only marred by the costly loss of Lord George Gordon. With his death the important Gordon aid was no longer assured. Before the battle Lord Gordon had vowed, "Let none of you be afraid that I shall not bring you, Baillie, by the neck from the midst of his party". MacMhuirich, the Clan

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131. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.191.

Ranald historian, records that Lord Gordon was shot while actually grabbing Baillie's sword belt and the Clan Ranald bard continued,

By this time the armies were in close conflict with each other, the cavalry seizing each other's heads with their left hands and striking one another on the heads with their pistols and the foot forces did not know what to do for the raging of the horse. Alaster, son of Ranald, son of Allan, is a witness to that, for he and Allan Og, the grandson of Alaster, were the officers of the Clanranald in that battle, and the grandson of Alaster himself was in the troop guarding Montrose. Alaster, son of Ranald, says that he himself was for a time and the point of his sword to earth, not knowing on whom he should strike a blow, not knowing a friend from a foe ... [Eventually the covenanters broke and] were not allowed to return to the charge, but were closely pursued and continually killed; they [Montrose's troops] were so mortified at the fall of Lord Gordon that they ordered that no quarter should be given to any man that day. 132

Argyll did not flee by sea on this day. Niall MacMhuirich states, in the 'Book of Clan Ranald' that after the battle

the laird of Glengarry [Angus MacDonnell] was in pursuit of the Marquis of Argyll until his horse became fatigued under him, and always within seeing distance of him, and the Marquis changed three horses that day fleeing from him, and escaped by the swiftness of his steeds. 133

Montrose now resolved to carry the war to the south and anxiously awaited the return of Alasdair and Lord Gordon's brother, James Gordon, Viscount of Aboyne, who had been despatched to his own lands to raise the Gordons who were especially valuable to Montrose because they could provide the cavalry he so badly needed. The first to return to the camp was a group of Atholl Highlanders who had left the army before the Battle of Alford to check on their people when they learned that General Baillie had burned his way through

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132. Ibid., p.195.

133. Ibid.



their native Atholl district. Later, Alasdair returned with an impressive west Highland force. He was accompanied by Donald MacDonald, younger of Clan Ranald. Donald led over 500 Clan Ranald warriors from Benbecula, South Uist, Eigg and the mainland Clan Ranald territories. MacMhuirich has left an interesting description of Donald, son of John Moydartach.

That man was a harmless, bashful, affable, unpre-  
suming man in the presence of his friends, but  
powerful and undaunted before his enemies, and  
was in the twentieth year of his age at that time. 134

Sir Lachlan MacLean was also present at the head of 700 of his clansmen from the considerable MacLean districts and isles in the west. Further contingents of MacGregors, MacNabbs, Appin Stewarts, Farquharsons and Glengarry MacDonnells, also arrived in Alasdair's van.

While highly pleased with this sizeable reinforcement, Montrose was nevertheless distressed that they had not brought more supplies with them. The men of Clan Ranald, led by Donald, quickly rectified this problem. In the "Book of Clan Ranald", MacMhuirich explained that no clan was more skilled or practised in the art of plundering the surrounding Angus and Mearns countryside and that Donald immediately led a great raid throughout these districts. While some other clans who took part in this great prey transferred their spoils home, the Clan Ranald, chief, Donald, would "not do any such thing, nor would he allow any of his men to go away from him with a prey or spoil". MacMhuirich also adds with honesty that in any case it was difficult "for men of the Isles to come with spoils to their own country from the Low Country". The "Book of Clan Ranald" also states that an old man in Mearns entertained the men of Clan Ranald

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134. Ibid., p.197.

with stories and told Donald that his own locale had not been raided since Donald, Lord of the Isles, had done so just before the Battle of Harlaw in 1411. The old man continued to Donald, "And I suppose, young man, that you are descended of him, if you be the Captain of Clanranald".<sup>135</sup>

Montrose held off from attacking Perth due to his lack of cavalry and engaged in a game of cat and mouse with General Baillie who led another covenanting army. Finally, Aboyne, James Gordon, returned with 400 Gordon horse and 800 foot. To this James Ogilvie, the 1st Earl of Airlie, added a further contingent of Ogilvie cavalry.

A powerful and ever growing covenanting army now blocked the path to the south at Scotland's narrow "waist" between Glasgow and Edinburgh. There, at Kilsyth, the two forces met. Among the covenanting leaders were Argyll, Baillie, Elcho and Tullibardine, all of whom, along with several others also present, had been soundly defeated by Montrose; they saw this as a golden opportunity for vengeance because they headed over 6,000 infantry and 800 cavalry. With the recent west Highland, Gordon and Ogilvie recruits Montrose commanded about 5,000 foot and 600 horse.

The Battle of Kilsyth was to be decided among the dykes and enclosures that separated the two armies. Ewen MacLean of Treshnish with a hundred of his immediate kinsmen and followers was ordered to occupy and hold an enclosure far in advance of the centre of the royalist force. The disposition of Montrose's various troops is uncertain, but it is known that the Clan Ranald and the MacLeans stood in the centre and that this section was commanded by Alasdair.

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135. Ibid.

At a council of war before the battle Montrose ordered the Highlanders to fight unrestricted in their long pale shirts without their plaids because the day was warm.

The covenanting centre closed on the dykes and Ewen MacLean found his position quite perilous. A dispute between the Clan Ranald and the MacLeans over which kindred should have the position of honour in the royalist ranks was forgotten when Ewen's predicament was realised. Immediately, Donald MacDonald, the Captain of the Clan Ranald, Donald MacHector Og MacLean and Patrick Caoch MacGregor "leapt over the dyke" followed by their clansmen and closed with the covenanting regiments who were pressing Ewen of Treshnish. It is recorded that "the first man of them that leaped the enemy's wall was Donald, that son of John Moydartach, followed by his men". In a panegyric poem written for Donald of Clan Ranald, his bard, Cathal MacMhuirich, says that he "would have known his footstep, leaping swiftly over the dykes".<sup>136</sup> In those dykes the royalist Gaels won the day.

Again the covenanting losses were staggering; again many covenanters lost their lives in a disorganised retreat that quickly became a rout; again the royalist victory was complete; and again the Marquis of Argyll chose to flee the scene by sea, this time to Berwick. The Gordon and Ogilvie cavalry had been highly effective; Montrose's grasp of the strategic situation had been up to its normal high standard, but as usual the onslaught of the Highland clans and Alasdair's mixed Gaels had been the deciding factor. Of all Montrose's opponents, only the equally Gaelic Campbells at Inverlochy

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136. Ibid., p.199.



appear to have been able to hold their ground for long in the face of the royalist Highland charge. Never in the campaign had Lowland levies stood up to this pressure. Not only were the kin-based tactics and warlike spirit of the Gaels suited to 17th century warfare, but also Lowlanders seem to have held an almost pathological fear of the wrath of the "wyld wykkyd Hieland-man". Montrose, Alasdair and the clan chiefs were aware of this advantage and consequently always used their Gaels as shock troops. The untested Fife recruits had even fled the field of Kilsyth at a critical moment before striking a blow or firing a shot. Southern Scotland lay at Montrose's feet.

But in the aftermath of the Battle of Kilsyth, his moment of supreme triumph, Montrose faced a new reality and in this altered situation lay the seeds of defeat. The royal army found itself in a new element: the Lowlands. True, all the major covenanting forces in Scotland had been defeated. For the moment all Scotland was his. Edinburgh surrendered; representatives of Glasgow scurried into the royal camp with congratulations and offers of substantial sums of money in return for protection. Many powerful Lowland lords and lairds suddenly appeared offering their services to the apparently successful royal army. But despite all these favourable developments there were two overriding problems. First, while Kilsyth shattered the covenanting cause in Scotland, it came too late to help the king, whose forces in England were near total defeat. And, second, Montrose now found himself well below the Highland line with objectives that would carry him even further away from that Gaelic world, its realities, its own particular political needs and its supply of effective and willing troops.

Montrose's goals no longer closely corresponded to those of

the traditional Gaelic camp. It was one thing to aid King Charles by raiding deep into the Argyllshire bastion of the ancient enemy, the Clan Campbell, or by beating a Lowland or Campbell army out of Atholl or Lochaber or Strathbogie; it was quite another to leave the comparative security of the Highlands and follow Montrose into the Borders or even distant England. Many clansmen simply departed for their native glens. This move was not only precipitated by the uncertainty of leaving familiar terrain, but also by another serious consideration. These Gaels who had faithfully followed Montrose still had enemies in the Highlands; their families, homes and crops were unprotected. The Clan Campbell was defeated, no longer a serious threat to Montrose, but it was not destroyed and its thirst for vengeance had been whetted, as its neighbours the Lamonts, MacDougalls, MacNaughtons, MacNabbs, MacGregors and MacLeans were soon to learn. Other Gaels who remained with the army for a time were discouraged when Montrose would not allow them to sack Glasgow, a pleasure to which they now felt entitled. Again, Montrose's goals were at cross-purposes with his Gaels'. To Montrose, Glasgow was an important part of his native Scotland, the Scotland he wanted to win for the king. This Scottish burgh was potentially a lucrative asset to the royalists. To his Highland troops it represented a separate culture, the home of their ancient Lowland adversaries, ripe for plunder. Moreover, these Gaels had won their own divided and dangerous portion of Britain for King Charles. For a full year they had devastated every internal and external enemy sent against them and they had defeated the only force that barred Montrose's path into southern Scotland, time for the loyal Lowlanders and English to do their part.

Alasdair MacColla and Montrose were also at odds. After Kilsyth, Alasdair departed with most of his force to campaign, again against his real enemy, the Campbells in Cowal and Kintyre (the old Clan Iain Mor lands were doubtless central to his long term objectives). It is likely that Alasdair MacColla and other leaders of Montrose's "old guard" were irritated at the attention given the many late-comers, those who had not come out for the king until after the victory at Kilsyth, after the royal cause seemed successful and therefore safe. Montrose needed these late-comers and the Lowland and Border support they seemed to offer, but to the experienced and often blooded veterans, such as Alasdair MacColla, Aboyne, Sir Lauchlan MacLean, John Moydartach and his son, Donald, these waverers seemed unreliable and self-serving. The experienced Gaelic leaders were proud men, proud of their accomplishments. They had openly and boldly joined Montrose and thereby risked all; many of the new-comers were suspected (often with good reason) of playing both sides against the middle by placing a son on each side, poor replacements, indeed, for the resolute old comrades in arms who had already fallen in the cause, men such as Lord Gordon and Donald Og Farquharson.

Montrose failed to persuade many of the Gaels to accompany him into the Borders and he failed to raise a substantial number of replacements. On 13th September at Philiphaugh, near Selkirk, Montrose learned that these Gaelic leaders and their martial followers were indeed hard to replace. His new and somewhat depleted force was caught unawares and crushed by the experienced David Leslie leading a force of light horse.<sup>137</sup>

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137. It should, however, be noted that Montrose had not been completely abandoned by the Highlanders or the Clan Ranald. While their numbers were small, the list of those killed at Philiphaugh includes two young Clan Ranald cadets, one of them a son of John Moydartach, the other from the Benbecula family. Ibid., p.175.



It has been said concerning Montrose's eventual failure that "the fate of Scotland was not to be decided by the successes of a Highland army".<sup>138</sup> True, but Montrose need never have crossed the Highland line and won the field of Kilsyth to have earned a special significance in Scottish history. Highland history is an important component of the History of Scotland and to the historical evolution of Gaeldom the Montrose episode was of the utmost consequence. The Gaels Montrose led were Scots and the magnitude of his effect on their development alone is enough to have assured his place in history.

For the first time since the 1545 rising of Donald Dubh, a substantial number of conservative Highland kindreds had been drawn into concerted action. During the Montrose period the serious political fragmentation that had caused so much internal strife and that had allowed the piecemeal elimination of several west Highland clans was replaced by a loose group of kindreds, still unstructured, but whose headmen realised they shared something of a common situation and outlook. This realisation was coupled with dramatic proof that united they were not powerless to defend their interests.

Once the able Montrose and the realities of the period had succeeded in pulling these clans together, once they had combined to produce the string of stirring and satisfying victories, then something of a tradition of unity under the royal Stewart banner had been created. Once this tradition of service to the Stewarts had been initiated, then such unified actions were less difficult to recreate. But it should never be forgotten that these west Highland leaders shared objectives with the King of Scots. The loyal Gaels were

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138. Donaldson, James V, op.cit., p.335.

never mindless puppets. They knew the political realities throughout Britain and Europe as well as in their native glens and they realised that they were in a position of power (as was seen in their forcing Montrose's "decision" to attack Argyllshire). Montrose and other royalists desperately needed their service and they knew it. From that position they were able simultaneously to aid their king and strike out at the most obnoxious examples of alien influence; both were the actions of a conservative people. But there was a serious negative side to all this. Montrose and his Gaelic lieutenants had exploited the Lowland ignorance and fear of the "terrible Gael" to great effect on the battlefield, but equally the use of the west Highland clansmen as "shock troops" throughout the Montrose period left an increased residue of fear and hatred towards the Gael on the part of Lowlanders and, to a lesser degree, the English. Over the next 100 years this fear, doubtless deepened during the Montrose campaign, and the almost racial hatred it fermented, would speed the destruction of traditional Gaeldom, "one of the oldest cultures in Europe".<sup>139</sup> Moreover, after this period it was no longer possible for Stewart or Hanoverian plotters or for Lowland and English strategists simply to shrug off the clans as anachronistic or bothersome. They were dangerous and effective, a force to be either exploited or eliminated.

In the final analysis Montrose's successes were largely Highland successes. True, Montrose was an able leader and had an excellent grasp of strategic matters, but his real claim to special historical note lay in his successful understanding of and interplay

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139. Cowan, op.cit., p.233.

with the Scottish Gael. He was able to bring together and hold the Highland clans together in an effective manner. He knew how to profit from their fighting abilities and particular kin-based tactics. Time after time Montrose benefited from their ability to move quickly over terrain that slowed or barred his enemies. At least twice this Highland capability had saved Montrose from potential disaster due to his lack of caution and unreliable intelligence and scouting systems. Previous studies have centred their emphasis far too much on Montrose first and Alasdair and his "Irish" second. Here, there is no attempt to belittle the manifest importance of these individuals or the Irish participation, but equally it is felt that there is a real need for a more realistic balance. Montrose and Alasdair did not lead a mass of savages but were allied with representatives of a distinctive and, to Montrose, a separate cultural entity, a culture with leaders and objectives of its own. The Scottish Gaels themselves were at least as important an ingredient to the successes of this period as Montrose or any other factor. It seems fully justifiable to point out that it was the combination of Montrose, Alasdair MacColla (himself a displaced Scottish Gael who led a mixed Irish and west Highland force) and the Scottish Highlanders (often led by John Moydartach, Captain of Clan Ranald) who shared responsibility for "Montrose's 'Glorious Year'". Later, Montrose was to say of the royal army's descent into Argyllshire:

I was willing to let the world see that Argyll was not the man his Highlanders believed him to be and that it was possible to beat him in his own Highlands. 140

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140. Mark Napier, ed., Memorials of Montrose and his Times, Vol.II, (Edinburgh: Maitland Club, 1850), p.176.



Here, Montrose gives an erroneous and somewhat boastful impression of his part. As has been seen, he did not initiate this course of action. Indeed, he was against it, but was forced, against his judgement, into this campaign by the leadership of the west Highland camp. Montrose was always militarily successful when leading an army of Highlanders and never notably successful without them. This fact is important and seldom, if ever, mentioned. Niall MacMhuirich, the Clan Ranald bard, spoke with considerable accuracy when he claimed that the warriors of the Gael were "the men who did all the service".

## CHAPTER II

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Philiphaugh did not end royalist hopes in Scotland. In the aftermath of that battle many of Montrose's followers, including a number of women and children, were butchered by the covenanters and during this slaughter Montrose was able to escape. He made his way back up to the Highlands where again he started raising the clans and made yet another attempt to come to terms with George Gordon, 2nd Marquis of Huntly. Later that year still another royalist force began to assemble in the southwest Highlands when Ranald MacDonnell, the Marquis of Antrim, landed in Kintyre, with an Irish force of his own. MacDonnell also held the king's commission. In this situation the Clan Ranald leadership chose to join their kinsman, Antrim, the heir to Islay and Kintyre, and not Montrose. The MacDonnells of Glengarry also joined this combined Irish and Scottish Highland force. Notably, the vast majority of this army and certainly its leadership were MacDonalds. The Clan Ranald contingent was led by Donald MacDonald, younger of Clan Ranald, and is said to have numbered 1300 men.<sup>1</sup> By June of 1646 Montrose had raised some 1,500 men and was continuing his dealing with Huntly when the king ordered all his forces in Scotland to disband. Both Montrose and Huntly obeyed and followed their separate and henceforth unexceptional paths to the executioner. Antrim returned with his followers to Ireland and the Highlanders of all forces returned home to await developments.

After the break-up of the royal forces the covenanters were active. General David Leslie and Argyll led forces into Islay, Mull,

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1. Hill, MacDonnells of Antrim, op.cit., p.234.

Moydart and other Highland areas where "The Book of Clan Ranald" claims, "all submitted to them except John Moydartach alone and those who joined him".<sup>2</sup> There is an apparent discrepancy between this source and the Memoirs of Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheill. In the second manuscript a meeting is described between "the principall gentlemen of the name Cameron" and the Marquis of Argyll who "was reducing Castle Tyrim, in Moydart, the last that held out for the King in those parts".<sup>3</sup> The available documentation does not clear up this point but since John Moydartach also held the mainland territories of Arisaig and Morar, to say nothing of the remote Isles of Eigg, Canna, South Uist and Benbecula, none of which were mentioned as having been visited by covenanting forces, it is possible that Castle Tioram was attacked and yet John Moydartach held out on some other part of his lands as MacMhuirich claims.

Following the executions of Montrose and Huntly and after all other royalist opposition had been banished to Ireland or foreign countries, MacMhuirich reports that John Moydartach continued the struggle. The "Book of Clan Ranald" states that the Captain of Clan Ranald would neither leave his Highland lands nor submit to the government and in Niall MacMhuirich's words "the few that lived of the party on the King's side were gathering around him".<sup>4</sup> In this difficult situation John Moydartach and his son Donald actually went on the offensive. John sent Donald off to the continuing Irish campaign at the head of 300 Clan Ranald veterans of the Montrose wars. Also accompanying Donald were the few remaining Irish troops who had

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2. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.205.

3. Drummond, ed., op.cit., p.84.

4. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.205.



stayed in Scotland under the protection of the Clan Ranald chief; John Moydartach and the rest of the kindred stayed in their Highlands and Isles "to defend his inheritance".<sup>5</sup>

In Ireland Antrim had remained active in the king's service and in 1648 he was joined by Donald MacDonald and his Clan Ranald force. An entry in the Argyll Synod records shows that this Clan Ranald contingent visited Islay on its way to Ireland and raised the people of that isle. Mr. Archibald MacAllaster, the presbyterian minister of Islay, testified that

being in ane Isle far distant frae any continent he was suddenly surprized by enemies coming to the Isle and was forced to converse with them and with his whole congregation who turned rebelle ... The Captain of Clanranald came to the Isle ... and the country people did join with the Captain of Clanranald. 6

Again, Angus MacDonnell of Glengarry was also active in Antrim's force with a number of his followers. Donald of Clan Ranald served as a Lieutenant-Colonel and saw action at the engagements of Belfast, Knockfergus, Coleraine and Londonderry. The royal army was finally defeated in County Kildare and both Donald of Clan Ranald and Angus of Glengarry were taken prisoners. Eventually, they were released and returned to the Highlands. On Donald's return to South Uist, Cathal MacMhuirich recited an impressive poem composed to express the kindred's great joy at Donald's safe return from so many battles.<sup>7</sup>

The "Book of Clan Ranald" also lists some of Donald's daoin-uaisle who returned from Ireland. They include Murcha MacNeill, son of the chief of the MacNeills of Barra, three Clan Ranald-MacDonald chieftains, plus Donald Roy, son of Donald, son of Lachlan MacMhuirich,

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5. Ibid.

6. CH557/1/p.151, 11th October 1648.

7. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.241.

John, son of Brian MacMhuirich, and John, son of Donald of Benbecula Beaton.<sup>8</sup> This list is interesting because it shows that the MacNeills of Barra were involved and had actually supported Donald to the extent of sending the chief's son, doubtless at the head of a number of that kindred's warriors. This evidence raises the distinct possibility that certain of the MacNeills had been active in the Clan Ranald regiment throughout the Montrose campaigns. The list is also useful because of the presence of Donald Roy MacMhuirich and John MacMhuirich among these impressive Clan Ranald and MacNeill of Barra daoin-uaisle. Their presence in this collection of the area's young men of influence indicates that while certain MacMhuirichs, such as Niall and Cathal, were employed by the Captains of Clan Ranald in artistic functions, others of this distinctive kindred were probably substantial landholders and military leaders. These MacMhuirichs appear to have ranked with the MacDonald daoin-uaisle of the kindred.<sup>9</sup>

In the complicated period during the Irish campaign and in the months that followed, the conservative Gaels did not play a central role in Scotland or England but external political events were eventually to have a direct influence on their Highland world. These British developments culminated in an act that had the effect of drawing most Scottish classes and factions together. On 30th January 1649, Charles I was beheaded. A sincere shock ran through all Scotland and the Scots were left with a basic problem. The regal union

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8. Ibid., p.207.

9. Ibid. John Beaton and his father were apparently of a Beaton family in Trotternish and were connected to the Clan Ranald through some unspecified function in Benbecula. In this manner the father came to be known as "Donald of Benbecula Beaton". (Information from Dr. John Bannerman, Dept. Scottish History, University of Edinburgh, October, 1981).

had been broken; what was to take its place? In less than a week the Scottish estates answered with a direct challenge to the regicide Commonwealth of England by naming Charles II not only King of Scots, but also of Great Britain, France and Ireland.

The situation in Scotland was curious. The recent enemies of King Charles I now prepared to go to war for his son. This new king, Charles II, had accepted the covenant that his father had long struggled against. And the proven royalist veterans of the Montrose and Irish campaigns were, at least until the Scottish defeat at Dunbar on 3rd September 1650, excluded from fighting for the new king by fanatical ministers.

For a variety of reasons the Clan Ranald was not closely involved in this strife. At the Battle of Worcester on 3rd September 1651 the army of Charles II was defeated by a man who was to leave his stamp on Scotland and especially the Highlands. This man was Oliver Cromwell.

This defeat realistically brought the Civil War to a close but this last campaign and battle offered several useful insights concerning Highlanders. They proved they could be disciplined and that they could be relied on to march far away from the Highlands and fight well if properly led. Worcester also showed that the Gaels of the conservative western block held no monopoly on courage and fighting ability. The Frasers and MacLeods were especially noteworthy in this battle. The staggering MacLeod losses in this conflict are often cited to "explain" subsequent MacLeod inactivity in later Stewart campaigns,<sup>10</sup> but in reality only that Worcester Campaign (and to a lesser extent

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10. Leslie Gilbert Pine, The Highland Clans, (Newton Abbot, Devon: David & Charles, 1972), p.108.



the closely following Glencairn Rising<sup>11</sup>) appealed to the MacLeods by combining royal Stewart objectives with those of the covenanting church. It was this combination, absent in all other Jacobite campaigns, that brought the covenanting Clan MacLeod to the field and despite the serious losses in that battle, only a few years after Worcester, the MacLeods were active against the English in the Glencairn Rising.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, if royalist objectives were combined with those of the covenanters, then despite the carnage of Worcester, the MacLeods and other kindreds would have taken the field.

Cromwell's consolidation of power in Scotland did not go smoothly and, as so often in the past, Scotland's Highland bastion was the centre of national resistance to an invading army. Rebellion was fanned by a strong anti-English feeling among most Scots, by the English Parliament's civil policy that had created hardships and a strong resentment among the Scottish nobility and gentry and by the failure of the English army of occupation to subdue unrest and disaffection in the Highlands. In 1653 William Cunningham, the 9th Earl of Glencairn, landed in the Highlands with the king's commission and the result was the Glencairn Rising.

Despite a sizeable turnout that included many of the expected kindreds who had followed Montrose, such as the MacDonnells of Glengarry, some covenanting clans such as the MacLeods, a few previously inactive kindreds such as the MacKenzies and some Campbells, especially of Glenorchy and Auchinbreck, and a considerable Lowland contingent, the rising was not especially successful. While the Clan Ranald

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11. F.D. Dow, Cromwellian Scotland, 1651-1660, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1979), p.138.

12. Ibid.

took part in most of the royalists' meetings, while it remained aloof from attempted English negotiations and while it may have quietly added men to Glengarry's several sizeable gatherings of west Highlanders, it kept itself overtly inactive.

The Glencairn Rising did not so much expire in a major battle. More accurately, it wasted away through a series of minor engagements, lack of foreign support, the success of the English tactic of ruining large tracts of the Highlands and thus removing the food and fodder so needed by the royalists, the ever increasing number of Cromwellian troops freed by the end of the Dutch war, and for want of decisive leadership that might well have brought the victories, momentum and recruits so badly needed.

The problem of leadership was quite serious. At one point two of the many royalist leaders, Angus MacDonnell of Glengarry and Archibald Campbell, Lord Lorne, the Marquis of Argyll's son, actually drew swords on each other. They were restrained, "yet parted great enemies".<sup>13</sup> On the other hand one of Cromwell's soldiers who was freed by the end of the Dutch war was to make a considerable impact on the course of the Glencairn Rising and, indeed, on the course of the history of the Highlands. This man, Major-General George Monck, was to be Cromwell's overseer of Scotland. His policy of mixing hard, well thought out military opposition on the one hand with decent, fair treatment for rebels who surrendered, inclined a fairly constant number of the disheartened royalist captains to give up the current frustrating struggle, if not the long-term royalist Scottish cause.

While it is unclear whether the Clan Ranald ever officially

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13. Dow, op.cit., pp.96-97.

submitted to Monck (MacMhuirich claims in the "Book of Clan Ranald" that the kindred never did), it is certain that the clan remained inactive. Why did the Clan Ranald stay quiet, especially given its recent and quite active royalist record and given the notable service to the House of Stewart (perhaps second in Gaeldom only to Alasdair MacColla) of its old chief, John Moydartach and his son, Donald, the active chief and veteran of the Montrose and Irish wars? First, the Clan Ranald had been very active throughout the Montrose period, even sending a contingent to the debacle of Philiphaugh; it had risen again when Ranald MacDonnell, Earl of Antrim, had landed in Kintyre and it even sent off a large force to the wars in Ireland where the men of Clan Ranald saw much action. Perhaps after all this service and loss the Clan Ranald leadership decided to take a "wait and see" attitude, especially when the Worcester campaign and the Glencairn Rising would have put the kindred under covenanting commanders. It is worth noting that covenanting MacLeods and the catholic Clan Ranald (both royalists at heart) were never active in the same campaign; the MacLeods were only active twice, in the Worcester and Glencairn episodes (the only two royalist campaigns with covenanting blessings and leadership) and the Clan Ranald was quite active in every royalist effort except those two.

In addition to the religious aspect, Clan Ranald inactivity during the Glencairn Rising can partly be seen arising out of a complicated political and financial situation. The Clan Ranald leadership owed considerable sums of money to the House of Argyll and under English rule the Campbell chief was in the ascendancy. Argyll had wisely used his position of power in the western Highlands and the English need for stability there to bargain for and attain a



favoured place with the Cromwellians. Consequently, under the English, more than ever, Argyll was a man to be feared, especially by those against whom he held a special grudge, such as the Clan Lamont and the MacNabbs, and by those who owed him money, especially the Clan Ranald, the MacLeans and several branches of the MacGregor kindred. And the Clan Ranald had good reason to fear MacCailein Mor and his kindred because, in addition to the financial burden, the Clan Ranald had played a major role in the twin Campbell disasters, the Battle of Inverlochy and the wasting of Argyllshire (and in the Argyllshire operation John Moydartach had been one of the three royalist commanders). The combination of debts to the House of Argyll, the certainty of Campbell thirst for revenge and the position of power and influence held by the Marquis of Argyll during the Commonwealth put the Clan Ranald in a potentially hazardous position.

It is known that in the spring of 1657 Argyll held meetings with various clan leaders over whom he held the economic club. At the time even the English suspected him of using these debts as a leverage to gain a certain control over the Clan Ranald, the MacLeans and the MacGregors.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the Clan Ranald actually saw Monck as a potential check to Argyll's power. Why was Monck seen as a possible control over his own ally? Basically, because the central objective in Monck's Highland strategy was quiet and not the further aggrandisement of Argyll's position. While Monck often buttressed Argyll's position, he did not want the Campbell chief to gain too much influence and power and if the Clan Ranald remained cautious, Monck was prepared to restrain Argyll and thus maintain a

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14. Ibid., p.224.

sort of balance of power and quiet in the Highlands; and Cromwell's general had the tools. If Argyll became over-mighty Monck could cut back his legal and financial tools and use the natural hostility of Argyll's feudal vassals and debtors to undermine his machinations and if the royalist kindreds became too independent Monck could bring pressure on them by allowing Argyll to press his economic-political demands with more telling effect. For example, in July 1656 Monck gave the Captain of Clan Ranald a remission from debts accumulated before January 1655<sup>15</sup> thus removing this Campbell influence over the Clan Ranald - but, of course, only for as long as it suited Monck's plans. The price the Clan Ranald paid for Monck's support against Argyll was remaining inactive; and during periods when covenanting commanders, "the detested followers of Calvin", to use John Moydart-ach's own earlier words, led royalist forces in unimpressive campaigns and when Argyll was especially powerful and threatening, this inactivity was not too great a price to pay.

Major-General George Monck, his Scottish policy and more especially his approach to the peculiar problems of the Highlands are compelling topics. To this study of the deterioration of traditional Gaelic society Monck's largely successful Highland policy is of special interest. Monck's administration of the Highland area is significant simply because it was so successful and also because he employed tactics that demonstrate a marked contrast with previous and later Highland policies originating out of both Edinburgh and London. For the first time in history, the Highlands were reduced to a semblance of order by external forces and this without

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15. Ibid., p.173.

the use of the hated and strife-causing "letters of fire and sword"; notable also by their absence were attempts to "eradicate" full kindreds, districts or the entire Gaelic culture.

In 1651 Cromwell had left Monck in charge of Scotland and, despite a period away while serving the war with Holland, from the 1654-55 end of the Glencairn Rising to the Restoration Monck exercised a high level of control in the Highlands. He employed a series of large forts and lesser military stations throughout Scotland. He erected substantial fortresses at Leith, Ayr, Inverness, Perth and Inverlochy, the last three situated in positions of strategic importance to the Highlands; in addition, a series of lesser garrison stations were distributed throughout Scotland, the majority of these smaller installations were placed in the Highlands or near the Highland line and were a central element in Monck's Highland policy both during and following the Glencairn Rising. These larger and lesser garrisons were designed to seal off the Lowlands from Highland incursions, thus limiting contact between Lowland and Highland royalists and depriving the rebels (or later, potential rebels) of easy access to the Lowlands' supply of horses and men. With this network of hard military reality as a foundation, Monck mixed an enlightened administration that was notable for its reason and restraint. Moreover, he treated the proud Gaelic chieftains in an honourable fashion and not as uncultured barbarians.

Undeniably, Monck's administration of the Highland sphere, a region of serious geographical barriers, diverse peoples and conflicting political and religious issues, did not go smoothly. A few previously hostile kindreds such as the Frasers came in with little trouble, but others such as the Clan Ranald appear to have stayed



quiet while refusing to submit and it was not until mid 1655 that MacKenzie of Seaforth, MacDonnell of Glengarry, MacLeod of Dunvegan, MacNaughton of MacNaughton and Lord Reay, Chief of Clan MacKay submitted, while still other kindreds, especially the Camerons of Lochell, maintained a prolonged and often vicious guerrilla war. Monck's policies towards the Clan Ranald and the Clan Cameron offer useful insights into his important Highland rule.

One reason for the Cameron hostility was that the garrison at Inverlochy straddled their lands. This fort, a thorn in the side of the Camerons as well as many other local Gaels, was crucial to Monck's Highland strategy. It lay in the centre of the most conservative west Highland clans. It was from this region that Montrose had drawn the bulk of his potent Gaelic support and it was this area that would be a focal point in every future Highland rising. Monck felt that civil law was inadequate to deal with the complex problems raised by the Highlands and believed a stiff martial law would better serve.<sup>16</sup> It was from the Inverlochy garrison that he felt this military rule could best be applied. In 1654 Monck wrote to Cromwell to ask that the Inverlochy installation be continued, because it "will bee of that concernment to us for the reducing of the Highlands, that I doe not know how wee shall bee able to compasse our worke without itt".<sup>17</sup> When needed, direct pressure from Inverlochy could be applied to the Camerons of Lochell, MacDonalds of Glencoe, Stewarts of Appin, MacDonnells of Glengarry, MacDonnells of Keppoch, the Clan MacLean and the Clan Ranald, plus a number of lesser area kindreds. And situated on the sea loch, Loch Linnhe, the garrison could be kept

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16. Ibid., p.145.

17. Ibid., p.133.

supplied in times of trouble; moreover, this government stronghold in Lochaber could be used as a centre for sea-based reconnaissance of the area and from there naval operations could be mounted and supplied against coastal and island kindreds further afield.

In three large-scale raids, Ewen Cameron of Lochail, the Chief of Clan Cameron, reported killing approximately 250 of Monck's puritan soldiers stationed at Inverlochy and in one, during close hand to hand combat Ewen himself is said to have bitten out the throat of an English officer.<sup>18</sup> Monck reacted to these provocations not with the typical escalation of violence but with moderation. He carried out prolonged and cautious negotiations. The hand of the Campbells, this time controlled and restrained by Monck, is easily discerned in these mediations. A Colonel Duncan Campbell, who had been captured by Lochail, was used as a go-between and eventually the Marquis of Argyll (with whom the young Ewen had been fostered) became surety for Lochail.

Other pieces of Monck's diplomacy are evident in a series of letters between Monck and Ewen Cameron of Lochail; an account of this correspondence is preserved in the "Inventory of the Lochail Charter Chest". In a letter dated 5th December 1655, Monck advised Lochail to "keep Good order in the country and to suppress all broken people among his clan That might Disturb the peace of the country".<sup>19</sup> This illustrates another of the basic elements of Monck's Highland policy. The various clan chiefs were to be held responsible for keeping their own clansmen within the law. In other words, the only historical order left intact in Gaeldom, the internal clan structure,

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18. Drummond, ed., op.cit., p.119.

19. GDI/658/1/p.39.

was to be used by Monck to help maintain law and order in the area.

In return for keeping his people under controll Locheil (and the other clan chiefs with whom Monck made similar agreements) was offered an indemnity for all past offences as is seen in a letter of 10th September 1655, addressed to the "Criminal Judges Rideing the Northern Circuit".

That the Greatest part of the people of Lochaber being Included in the Articles made upon the coming in of the Laird of Locheil wherby it is concluded That neither himself nor any of his party should be questioned for what they have Done during the warrs Therfor he ordered him to Desist from all such prosecutions that might in any ways Infringe the said Treaty or occasion new feuds. 20

This forethought of Monck's in trying to avoid new feuds was, indeed, a novel consideration for a man structuring Highland policy. In one case, Monck even went so far as to interfere in internal Clan Cameron matters when it appeared that a conflict might develop between Locheil, the chief, and Duncan MacMartin (alias Cameron) the chieftain of the MacMartins of Letterfinlay, an important branch of Clan Cameron. On 29th September 1656, Monck wrote to Locheil saying that he had been informed that Locheil had turned MacMartin out of his lands and seized his cattle and

in case he had not good Reason for what he had Done Desiring him to Restore the said McMartine to his Lands and funder That he was Informed Locheil Kept out of the way on that account But assures him that he had nothing to say to his charge and therfor Desires He may not absent himself. 21

This mixture of force with careful management and tact was at the heart of Monck's success. In one other case Monck is seen going to

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20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p.90.



the extent of repaying Lochell and his people for all the wood used by the Inverlochy garrison "since the Capitulations".<sup>22</sup> Several other examples of Monck interceding for Lochell, his inveterate enemy, are recorded in the Inventory.<sup>23</sup>

The Clan Ranald reliance on Monck fostered during the Commonwealth endured into the Restoration period. In a letter dated 29th August 1664 from "Castle Tyrholme" Donald MacDonald of Moidart, younger Clan Ranald, asked James Lord Ogilvie, to raise an issue with Monck who had, by then, become the Duke of Albemarle. After discussing "ane cast of hawks" Donald said that

Lykewyse I wrotte to your Lds/ father and enclosed ane Letter to your Ld. with ane copie of ane Letter written be Sr. James Mcdonald to me vindicating himselfe of that certificate supposed to been given be him to My Lord Argylle to my prejudice, but in case they have not come to your Lds/ hands I have made so bold to send ane other of the same requesting your Ld/ will give me the favour as to lett my Lord Duke of Albemarle see it that his Ld/ and all may know how much I am wronged be my Lord Argylle in my interest. 24

Nowhere is Monck's important role as a peacemaker and buffer between the kindreds of the conservative west Highlands and Argyll made more clear than in another letter of 28th December 1665 from Donald, younger of Clan Ranald, to Lord Ogilvie. Again friction with the Campbell lord occasioned Clanranald's uncertainty: "I desyre to heare of your Lds/ latest news & how his highnesse The Duke of Ablemorle [sic] doeth for his Lord/ being still at London doeth sore affrighte me".<sup>25</sup>

It should, however, be added that throughout his period of rule

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22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., pp.39-41.

24. GD 16/34/115.

25. GD 16/34/129.

in Scotland Monck maintained a firm hand, both on land and sea. When discussing the lack of security in the western Highlands and the adjacent isles, Monck wrote to Cromwell on 22nd December 1655 that

the truth of itt is wee have never a shippe uppon those Coasts, butt now itt were good to thinke of sending a shippe to lie about the Isle of [Clan Ranald's] Canna ... where there is a good harbour and to lett one that knowes those coasts come alonge in the shippe and if they want a pylott they may send to the Garrison at Inverloughee for one; after their arrivall att Canna. 26

This ship was to have the triple purpose of guarding against possible foreign invasion, to check movement between the Irish and Scottish Gaels and to prevent the free movement of suspect kindreds in those waters. It should also be noted that Canna was a traditional Clan Ranald isle and that the ship's position among the Inner Hebrides blocked easy access between Clan Ranald's island possessions in the Outer and Inner Hebrides with his mainland territories. It was not until the closing months of the Jacobite Rising of 1745-46 that this highly effective tactic was again used on anything like a regular basis. An armed vessel was also used to patrol another potentially dangerous Highland trouble spot, Loch Ness. And, in general, clan chiefs were held responsible for keeping their own people quiet. For example, the Glencoe chief, Alasdair MacDonald, was empowered to act against robbers in his own district. By 1658 the commander of Inverlochy was able to make the statement, "there is not one robbery all this year, although formerly it was the trade they lived by to rob and steal".<sup>27</sup> But here it should be noted that Monck's

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26. MS9752/5 .

27. John Turloe's Collection of State Papers, Vol.4, 1742, p.401, in Donaldson, James V, op.cit., p.349.

successful Highland policy was a part of his equally fruitful Scottish administration. When Thomas Burton made the following well-known observation, he was commenting on the period's unusual lawfulness in all of Scotland, not just the Highlands. Burton said,

A man may ride all Scotland over with a switch in his hand and £100 in his pocket, which he could not have done these five hundred years. 28

Clearly, Monck used a variety of well considered policies in his successful administration of Gaelic Scotland and the years of his rule provide a sure example of how the Highlands might have been ruled without recourse to detrimental devices such as "letters of fire and sword" and attempts to "root out" and "exterminate" troublesome kin-groups. And this is not idle speculation on what might have been; rather, it is based on a real period of peace, and a period growing out of a considerable time of warfare, strife and hatred. The large forts and lesser garrison stations could be, and were, recreated; the moderate and reasoned policies never were. However, one cautionary point should be raised on the topic of Monck's Highland policy. From the early 17th century the Highland people were generally peaceful during periods of political calm in Britain. Cromwell's effective British rule was highly significant in helping to create a Highland atmosphere in which Monck's firm-handed reason could triumph.

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The Restoration of Charles II ushered in a period of relative calm for the Clan Ranald and most of its conservative neighbours. Old John Moydartach survived the Montrose wars, the Cromwellian era

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28. John Towill Rutt, ed., Diary of Thomas Burton, esq., (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), p.401.



and lived well into the Restoration, dying in 1670. His son, Donald, successfully managed the kindred throughout most of this era, but the above correspondence<sup>29</sup> between Donald and Lord Ogilvie demonstrates that the new Earl of Argyll and his Clan Campbell remained a serious consideration even in this time of royalist ascendancy.

Earlier, in the uncertain period while Monck struggled to initiate his rule in Scotland, Archibald, the Marquis of Argyll, had been active in punishing the clans over whom he held feudal, not kin-based, rights via the heritable jurisdiction. During the Montrose campaigns many of these Argyllshire kindreds had reacted against the great MacCaillein Mor and the alien system that gave him and his Campbells control over them, their own chiefs and their conservative point of view. The MacNabbs, MacDougalls, MacNaughtons, MacGregors and MacLeans all came in for this Campbell revenge. The small Clan Lamont was singled out for special treatment and suffered in a way the Glencoe people never knew from Campbell deceit and excess. It can and should be pointed out that while the later Glencoe massacre was not purely a Campbell atrocity, the slaughter of the Lamonts; after their having been misled by Campbell promises of lenient treatment, was the sole and undoubted responsibility of the Clan Campbell.<sup>30</sup>

During the years of Monck's administration MacCaillein Mor also bought up the debts of the Chief of the Clan MacLean. Sir Allan MacLean of Duart was unable to repay and the inability to pay off debts owed to the House of Argyll was always a serious matter to

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29. See above, p.148.

30. Hector McKechnie, The Lamont Clan, 1235-1935, (Edinburgh; Neill & Co. Ltd., 1938), pp.180-85.

Highland kindreds. In this case, as it had been in many others, it was to lead to strife, warfare and the eventual dismemberment of the weaker clan, this time the ancient and powerful Clan MacLean.

At the Restoration Archibald Campbell, the Marquis of Argyll, scurried to London to congratulate Charles II on his successful return, but MacCailein Mor's past anti-royalist actions were not forgotten. He quickly found himself in the Tower of London and later was taken back to Scotland where his lands were forfeited and he was executed. His head was impaled on the same spike that had borne that of his old adversary, Montrose, a few years before.

The Restoration was not an auspicious time for Clan Campbell, but in 1669 the son of the executed Campbell chief, Archibald, the younger, was restored to all his father's lands and titles, except the Marquessate. This new MacCailein Mor continued his father's heavy-handed rule within the feudal Argyllshire holdings and he maintained the successful expansionist policies of his forebears. In this period the Camerons of Lochell, the Clan Ranald and other MacDonalds, the Stewarts of Appin and especially the MacLeans all felt Campbell pressure. With the exception of the hapless MacLeans, these conservative kindreds were reasonably successful in frustrating Campbell designs. The fact that the young Archibald's father, the Marquis, had purchased the MacLean debts seriously altered that kindred's legal position and harmed its defensive posture.

The Campbell military takeover of the MacLean lands was but the prelude to a long-term process of Campbell expansion and occupation. Campbell expansion is, in general, a central topic in this study and, consequently, it is proper to take a closer look at this specific and reasonably well-documented example of Argyll's methods of conquest.

This material will also provide a foundation for a later section<sup>31</sup> that will examine the methods of Campbell occupation and management in these old MacLean districts, thus making possible a series of comparisons and contrasts with developments on Clan Ranald's property. And, finally, it will be demonstrated that the large Clan Ranald debt to Argyll actually forced Donald of Clan Ranald into some sort of service to the Campbells in their conquest over the MacLeans.

Initially, Argyll raised a series of legal measures against the MacLeans, first to recover the money and when these failed, he rapidly followed with a series of orders of expulsion.<sup>32</sup> The MacLean hierarchy was to be removed from their ancient holdings in Mull, Morvern and Tiree. The MacLeans frowned on these developments and prepared to resist, although it should be mentioned that, initially at least, legal resistance might have served the MacLeans better than military resistance. As the violent tone of Argyll's judicial orders increased and as the size of the party delivering these legal processes grew in number and warlike appearance, so too did the MacLean opposition. In the summer of 1673 several west Highland clans did go to the assistance of the MacLeans. Sir Ewen Cameron records that "he[and 'his men'] hastened to Lochaber, where joyning the Lord M'Donald of Glengary, the Lairds of Keppoch, Glencoe and others, they marched into Mull, and prevented Argyll's invasion for that year".<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, the "others" are never named and it is unknown whether the Clan Ranald was involved in this support or not. However, it is known that Clanranald himself owed Argyll £20,000 Scots (compared to

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31. See below, p.379 and Appendix III, pp.liii-lvii.

32. GD50/216/59/pp.22-24.

33. Drummond, ed., op.cit., p.196.



the MacLean debt of £121,000 Scots)<sup>34</sup> and so Donald of Clan Ranald may have chosen to remain quiet. Eventually, violence broke out. On 16th July 1674 Argyll sent a force against Duart Castle, the most important of the MacLean fortresses on Mull and the home of Sir Allan MacLean, chief of that kindred. Inside that Mull stronghold with Sir Allan were his son Hugh, John MacQuarrie of Leggan, uncle to the young chief of the MacQuarries of Ulva, an unrelated area kindred that had been a traditional MacLean ally for centuries and several other MacLean daoine-uaisle. The leader of the Campbell force reported that

because we could not get patent entrie to the said house, we made use of his Majesties kies, by stricking at the yetts and doors thereof with hammers; whereupon the said John M'Quarrie and remanent persons aforesaid, most violently resisted and deforced ws in the execution of our officies of fireing and shooting at ws with guns and hagbutts to the number of ten or ellewine shotts. 35

On 4th August a stronger party led by a "Captain Middletown" was sent against the MacLean fortress. Again they were fired upon by the MacLeans from within and at the same time

[Lauchlan] M'Lean of Brolois and his complices [including his son Hector Og], to the number of seven score of armed men, were drawn up in ane military posture, with their plaids thrown from them, hard by the house of Dowart, for the assistance of those within the house, and which they did boldly intimate to Captain Middletown and his partie; and the said M'Lean of Brolois, by ane letter under his hand, and direct to Lochnell, assures they would meet with resistance to blood. 36

It should be noted that the above reference to Lochnell, Alexander

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34. Ibid., p.195, see also GD201/5/934.

35. GD50/216/59/pp.22-23.

36. Ibid., pp.25-26.

Campbell, demonstrates that this was not simply a small legal force but that it also included a Clan Campbell contingent. It is equally telling that Lauchlan MacLean chose to issue his challenge to the Campbell leader, Alexander of Lochnell, and not Captain Middletown.

Then followed the expected "letters of fire and sword" in which a sizeable force was theoretically mobilized against the MacLeans. This force consisted of three basic sections. The first was the substantial Campbell contingent; it included Lord Neill Campbell and the Campbell daoin-uaisle: Glenorchy, Calder, Ardkinglas, Barbreck, Moy, Lawers, Inveraw, Auchinbreck, Caddel and Lochnell. The second section of this group included a number of non-Campbell chiefs, such as Sir Norman MacLeod, John MacLeod of Dunvegan, Ewen Cameron of Lochell, Duncan Stewart of Appin, Allaster MacAllaster of Loup and Donald MacDonald of Clan Ranald. Finally, and somewhat strangely, included in the force that was to move against the defiant MacLeans were several MacLean landholders who had not been netted in Argyll's financial trap: these included the MacLean daoin-uaisle: Lochbuie, Ardgour, Kinlochaline, Kingairloch and Torlusk.<sup>37</sup>

The exact actions of the non-Campbell and non-MacLean kindreds is uncertain, but there is direct evidence concerning the MacLeans who were ordered to attack their own kin. When Argyll launched his large-scaled invasion of Mull in 1675, Sir Allan MacLean raised the clan for defence and despite the legal orders that cut across MacLean kin-based ties, Sir Allan was "joined by Hector M'Lean of Lochbuy, who had no [feudal] interest whatever in the estate of Dowart"<sup>38</sup> and an entry in the Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, dated

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37. R.P.C., Vol.1673-76, op.cit., p.273, and GD50/216/59/pp.22-24.

38. GD50/216/59/p.40.

22nd July 1675 gives a useful clue as to the actions of these other MacLean daoin-uaisle. In this document these MacLeans, John of Ardgour, Archibald of Kinlochaline, Hugh and Allaster, brothers to the young Kingairloch and Lauchlan of Torlusk, were "denounced rebels and putt to the horn" along with the above documented Hector of Lochbuie and the previously committed Lauchlan of Borlois and John MacQuzarrie.<sup>39</sup> All of these men were to answer to the law for

Convocating the number of thrie or four hundreth men in Apryle last by sending of fyre croces<sup>40</sup> throw the isle of Mull, Morvern and uther places, and remaining and abyding upon the lands of Knokermartin in ane warlyk postur.<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, Ardgour, Kinlochaline, Kingairloch and Torlusk, like their kinsman Lochbuie, had ignored their legal orders; they had disregarded their own positions of safety and the potential for profit that service to the government and the House of Argyll held, and they had answered their chief's call for help.

An account of this MacLean resistance has survived. It recorded that the assembled MacLeans

continued in arms to the number of three or four hundred under Lauchlan M'Lean [of Brolois] and a hundred men under the command of [Hector MacLean of] Lochbuy, from 22d of April to the end of that month; and some time during that period, they, with a variety of other persons, seized upon the house and fort of Cairnburg, situated upon a rock or small island in the ocean, at some distance from the west coast of Mull, which they garrisoned. They then committed various depredations in Tirie, by quartering and sorning, - deforced a messenger in executing an arrestment there, - and entered into a league or bond, by binding themselves upon oath to join and adhere to one another.<sup>42</sup>

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39. R.P.C., Vol. 1673-76, op.cit., p.433.

40. Fiery Cross, a device that signaled a kindred when mobilizing for military action. For fuller explanations, see below, p.255.

41. R.P.C., Vol. 1673-76, op.cit., p.433.

42. GD50/216/59/p.40.



But what of the Clan Ranald, the Camerons and the Stewarts of Appin? These west Highlanders would hardly have welcomed the destruction of their traditional conservative allies, the MacLeans, especially at the hands of the Clan Campbell. Certainly, the MacDonalds saw the Clan MacLean as perhaps their most potent west Highland ally. Even in his poem on the great rout at Inverlochy, that depicts the struggle as largely a MacDonald vs. Campbell one, Iain Luim MacDonnell, the Keppoch bard, mentions the MacLeans when he recites to Alasdair MacColla:

Alasdair of the sharp venomous blades had you had  
the heroes of Mull [the MacLeans], those of them  
[the Campbells] who escaped you would have been  
induced to stay when the dulse-eating rabble was  
in retreat. 43

At Inverlochy only Sir Lauchlan MacLean of Duart and thirty or so of his daoine-uaisle had been present.

The movement of Campbell power up the western seaboard until, along with the earlier Campbell conquest of Ardnamurchan, it fully flanked the Clan Ranald's southern boundary must have been equally disquieting. The loss of a potent ally and the further aggrandisement of the ever-growing enemy were bad enough, but because of feudal duties and Scotland's peculiar methods of "keeping order", the conservative clans had been ordered to assist in destroying the MacLeans. A detailed account of their actions in this confused period would be fascinating; unfortunately, no such detailed account has survived. But there are clues concerning the Clan Ranald that relate to this strife on Mull.

This information is found in two Clan Ranald contracts, one

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43. MacKenzie, ed., op.cit., pp.24-26.

between Donald of Clan Ranald and Archibald, the 9th Earl of Argyll. In this document, dated 28th March 1674, Donald was obliged to provide "ane sufficient Gallie of sixteen oars sufficiently appoynted with men" and other necessities for 14 days yearly between the "poynt of Ardnamuchan and assint" when required by Argyll and

the sd. donald Mc Donald and his forsaides shall be holdne and obleidged be themselves in ther proper persones or be ther neirest and worthiest kinsmen being of lawll. age To serve the said Noble Earle and his forsaides with ane hundreth sufficient men in warr and hostings deuillie prepared in all the said noble Earle his lawll. occasiones and bussiness Betwixt the Isle of Mull and Stonehead of Assint. 44

The other document, signed "At Castle tirholme", on 6th November is a wadset between Donald of Clan Ranald and Ruairi MacDonald of Glenalladale. This wadset shows that Clanranald took the agreement with Argyll seriously enough to have passed the order on to Ruairi and his kinsmen. In this document Ruairi is instructed to

releive the sd. Donald McDonald and his forsaides of ane proportionall part effeirand to the saids lands of ane sufficient galley of sixteen oares which the sd. Donald McDonald is oblidgeit to furnish to the said Earle of Argyle and his aires and successors sufficientlie appoynted with men and necessities be the space of fourteen days yearlie betwixt the poynt of Ardnamurchan and Assint when he shall be advertised and required for that effect. And also the said Rorie McDonald and his forsaides shall be obleidgeit to relieve the said Donald McDonald and his foresaides of ane proportional part effeirand to the saids lands of an hundredth sufficient men which the said Donald and his foresaides are obedgit be themselves in their own proper persones, or be their neirest and worthiest kinsmen being of lawful age to serve the said Earle of Argyle and his foresaides in warr and hostings duly prepaired in all the said noble Earl his lawfull occasiones and business betwixt the Isle of Mul and Stonehead and Assint. 45

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44. RD2 (Dal.)/38/19/Reg. 18th March 1674.

45. GD50/216/59/1674 and RD2 (Dal.)/38/19.

A mass of Clan Ranald documentation has survived in various collections in the form of deeds, wadsets and tacks. In only one other Clan Ranald manuscript has any other such specific military clause been discovered and this clause did not apply directly to military service but to the proposed erection of a "fortalice" or stronghold.<sup>46</sup> The conclusion seems obvious; the Clan Ranald expected and received military service from its several branches as a matter of course and consequently this sort of specified written obligation was normally unnecessary. But in an unpopular cause such as this, Argyll felt it necessary to specify to the Captain of Clan Ranald, his vassal, the expected duties; and, in turn, Donald of Clan Ranald felt it necessary to transmit in written detail these military obligations to his kinsmen, such as Ruairi MacDonald of Glenalladale. Coupled with the information from these contracts is an interesting declaration by Archibald, the Earl of Argyll. On 10th March 1680 Argyll stated that on account of the Chief of Clan Ranald's "good service" he would not seek relief out of the 20,000 merks which the latter owed him.<sup>47</sup> Given the date and the specific evidence from the Clan Ranald contracts, this "good service" must bring to mind the downfall of the MacLeans.

Until further evidence is uncovered (possibly in the now closed Argyll Muniments), the best conclusion concerning the actions of the Clan Ranald and its neighbours during the period seems to be that the cause was unpopular enough to have required the unusual step of being specifically recorded in legal obligations but, equally, despite the repugnant nature of this service to Argyll, it was

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46. RD4 (Mack)/42/800/18th September 1672.

47. GD201/5/934.



mandatory, and some "good service" was performed. Perhaps these conservative kindreds, who would certainly have been held suspect by the Campbell commanders, were used only in support roles. One other observation is possible here. The striking lack of documentation may be significant. It is likely that these clans kept as quiet as possible. Perhaps they went through the motions of supporting Argyll but in fact did little. Argyll was not in a position of absolute power in this period of Stewart ascendancy. He would have found it difficult to force more from these conservative Highlanders and it is quite likely that they would have done no more than necessary for MacCaillein Mor. Argyll's position of relative weakness in this period is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the MacLean daoin-uaisle Lochbuie, Ardgour and Coll were all able to retain their estates despite their having gone to war against him, although they did eventually become vassals of his successors.<sup>48</sup> If Argyll had been unable completely to crush these MacLeans for their open and violent defiance, it is doubtful that he could have punished the reluctant Clan Ranald, Camerons of Lochail and Stewarts of Appin for half-hearted service on his behalf.

In this period, despite the Clan Ranald debts, even the House of Argyll could not realistically contemplate consuming the Clan MacLean and the Clan Ranald. Indeed, the large debts to Argyll did not keep the Clan Ranald inactive in 1689 or 1715; and in 1715 Allan MacDonald of Clan Ranald actually led a Jacobite invasion into Argyllshire against Inverary. So, clearly, while the Clan Ranald performed some service to Argyll, it does not seem to have been a

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48. Gregory, op.cit., pp.419-420.

great one; and there is one clue that may offer something of an explanation.

In his Memoirs, Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochell states that the other chiefs felt the MacLeans were mistaken to have first defended themselves by going to war when, with friends in power in London, legal means might have better served.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps, because of this important disagreement in tactics and because of Argyll's pressure, Donald of Clan Ranald used his influence in 1674 to convince the other conservative chiefs not to go to war to aid the MacLeans, as they earlier had done in 1673. In the 1670's the Stewarts were in power and any open revolt would have been a revolt against them, so this issue had the potential for splitting the entire west Highland group of conservative kindreds from the Stewart ranks. This would have been a great price to pay, especially, given the MacLean intransigence over the option of a (possibly fruitful) legal defence; and, in any case, war would have remained an option had the legal struggle failed.

The fortunes of the majority of the Clan MacLean fluctuated conversely with that of the House of Argyll throughout the remainder of the 17th and 18th centuries. The Clan MacLean enjoyed a brief respite when Argyll was forfeited in 1681 and executed for rebellion in 1685. But with the 1688 fall of the Stewarts, it became clear that the fate of the people on the old MacLean lands - with the exception of those in the districts held by Lochbuie, Ardgour and Coll - were to be decided by the alien Clan Campbell.

The remainder of the Restoration was a relatively quiet period for the Clan Ranald. Donald MacDonald was active in regaining the feudal titles to his kindred's lands from the Earl of Argyll and in

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49. Drummond, ed., op.cit., p.196.

attempting to repay the many lingering debts that hung over the clan as a result of the preceding years of strife. He also appears to have visited Ireland in 1676 and MacMhuirich records that he was occasionally at Court where he was well received due to "the excellence of his disposition",<sup>50</sup> and, of course, his record as a staunch royalist. A legal document dated 10th March 1680, in which he purchased the rights to his kindred's ancient possession of Canna from Argyll, lists Donald MacDonald of Benbecula as legal agent "for Donald McDonald of Moydart Captain of the family of Clanranald" and "constable proprietor of the Isle of Canna and others".<sup>51</sup> In 1686 when Donald of Clan Ranald died he left two sons, Allan and Ranald, who were raised and tutored by this same Donald of Benbecula.

Before turning to the years of Allan, it would be useful to take a closer look at this Benbecula duin-uasal, Donald MacDonald, who was to play a central role in maintaining the Clan Ranald's conservative outlook through an unusually long and important period. In a sense Donald MacDonald of Benbecula was a link between the Civil War period and the post-1715 Jacobite era. It is unlikely that Donald himself was old enough to have been active in that early strife, but it is known that his father, Ranald Og, followed John Moydartach in the Montrose campaigns and that other young daoin-uaisle of the Benbecula family (possibly including the young Donald) had accompanied Donald of Clan Ranald to the campaign in Ireland.<sup>52</sup> Donald of Benbecula himself was certainly a noted royalist during the restoration and an active Jacobite thereafter. He led the men of Clan Ranald

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50. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.207.

51. GD201/5/936.

52. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.207.



to the field of Killiekrankie.' He was tutor for the two young sons of Donald of Clan Ranald. He oversaw the kindred during the minorities and exiles of these young chiefs. Following the death of Allan in the Rebellion of 1715, Donald was active in the legal struggle to recover the titles to the kindred's lands; and in 1725 after the death of Ranald, Donald won a contest with his kinsman Donald of Kinlochmoidart and became Captain of Clan Ranald.

Perhaps the most important of all the services performed by Donald was that of Tutor to the young sons of the deceased chief. The conservative outlook of these two important young men was a significant factor in the kindred's development and often behind that traditional attitude lay the guiding hand or at least influence of the conservative "Tutor of Benbecula". Any consideration of this powerful Clan Ranald duin-uasal necessitates a look at the position of tutor, a position that certainly was not unique with Donald, but that recurred in the Benbecula family.

This Benbecula section of the Clan Ranald originated with Donald's grandfather, "Ronald MacAllane vicEane of Castle Borve", (an old stronghold in western Benbecula). This Ranald of Benbecula was the fourth son of Allan of Clan Ranald, grandfather to the John Moydartach of the Montrose wars. Ranald of Castle Borve had a turbulent career having four wives from important Highland and Irish families in the old handfast manner and a fifth marriage (this time Christian) to Margaret, daughter of Angus MacDonnell of Dunnyveg and the Glens. In 1618 Ranald received remission for killing a certain Allester Roy MacDonald Roy Vic Innes and, as was seen above,<sup>53</sup> when

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53. See above, p.72.

Father Cornelius Ward, one of the Irish missionaries, was in Benbecula, he referred to Ranald, his host and protector, as "a staunch defender of catholicism"<sup>54</sup> and a few years later Ranald proved that this praise was well deserved. In 1630 he earned the extreme disfavour of the Scottish Kirk for rescuing Patrick Chagnetie, an *Hebridean* Irish priest, who had been seized while conducting forbidden masses in the Hebrides.<sup>55</sup> In a document dated 10th November 1618, leading elements of the Clan Ranald were taken to law for a raid in which they were charged with "wounding and robbing the tenants of M. Donald Campbell of Farbrek". In this manuscript the following occurs,

John Mcdonald vc allane vc eane of Ylantyrum  
Captne of the clanranald [the young John  
Moydartach], Ronald Mcallane vceane [of Castle  
Borve] his uncle and Tutor & their associates  
ordaired to enter prison in Edn. Tolbooth. 56

Of course, they never entered prison and this particular raid was of no special importance, but the fact that Ranald of Castle Borve was listed as the young John Moydartach's "uncle and Tutor" is interesting.

Twice in the 17th century, the only two times in that period when the Captain of Clan Ranald was a minor, the Benbecula family was selected for the important job of raising and educating a future chief; and the high achievement of the two young wards, John Moydartach of the Montrose wars and Allan of the Rising of 1715, in their later careers bear witness to the success of those "tutors of Benbecula". Why was the Benbecula family selected in both cases? A specific answer to that question is unrecorded, but there are

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54. Giblyn, Franciscan Mission, op.cit., p.72.

55. MacDonalds, Clan Donald, op.cit., Vol.II, pp.346-48.

56. MS 2133, Donald Gregory's notes, p.106.

telling clues. First, both Tutors, Ranald of Castle Borge and his grandson, Donald of Benbecula, were noted for their abilities, conservative outlooks and high personal standing among the leadership of the west-Highlands and Isles.<sup>57</sup> Second, the Benbecula family held an especially powerful position within the Clan Ranald. Its territorial holdings were significant, including considerable lands in South Uist and Arisaig as well as Benbecula. Third, the two tutors were Roman catholic and so espoused the same religion as that of the vast majority of the Clan Ranald and that of the deceased chiefs' family. In a report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, apparently in the hand of Mr. James Stevenson, the minister of Ardnamurchan parish, written around 1710 (after Allan of Clan Ranald had come of age) entitled "Anent papist in the Highlands, Argyllshire & Inverness", the most powerful catholics were listed as "Glengarrie old and young, Captain of Clanranald, Bara, Moror [and] Benbecula". This manuscript also takes special notice of Donald MacDonald of Benbecula when it later reports that the "priest have all manner of encouragment from the ffoursaid gentlemen and especially from Benbecula, a most cunning and violent papist".<sup>58</sup> The final probable reason that the Benbecula family was selected to oversee the upbringing of a future chief throughout the 17th century was that it held the best claim to the position "Captain of Clan Ranald" after the current chief's immediate family. This was demonstrated beyond any doubt in 1725 on the death of Allan's brother, Ranald of Clan Ranald, when this same Donald of Benbecula won a contest over another powerful kindred duin-uasal,

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57. MacDonalds, Clan Donald, op.cit., Vol.II, pp.346-47.

58. CH1/2/29/p.569.



Donald of Kinlochmoidart, for the leadership of the clan. The exact method of this selection is unrecorded but it is known that the Lord Lyon was not involved, so the kindred itself, in some unexplained manner, decided the case in Donald MacDonald of Benbecula's favour.<sup>59</sup> The position of Tutor was not unique in the Clan Ranald; other kindreds employed "Tutors" and their personal position within their own clans often closely resembled Benbecula's. An entry in the Records of the Argyll Synod, dated 27th October 1696, is of interest as an example of the position of tutor in another conservative west Highland kindred. In this manuscript "Johne Stewart fiar of Ardsheal" is listed as "Tutor of Appin".<sup>60</sup> In Ardsheal's case, as in Benbecula's, his family held considerable power among Scotland's conservative Gaelic leadership as well as within its own kindred. Ardsheal's land holdings were notable among other clan daoin-uaisle, his family shared the same religious beliefs with the chief's family and, eventually, this family, too, would succeed into the position of chief of the kindred.

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The year 1688 witnessed a major shift in the direction of British political developments. That year saw the end of the Restoration and the royal Stewarts on a British throne. For the Gaels it dashed hopes of James VII abolishing the heritable jurisdictions; it ended the satisfying opportunities for loyal service to a universally accepted King of Scots, such as the earlier Highland Host; it ushered the Presbyterian Kirk back to power; and it

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59. See below, pp.370-72.

60. CH2/557/3/p.164.

raised the spectre of a restored and vengeful House of Argyll.

The Revolution of 1688 was "Glorious" and "bloodless" - for Whigs, most English and a string of historians of that ilk. It was not for all Scots and it most certainly was not for the Irish and for the Gaels of the west Highlands.

In the crisis James VII and II proved as uninspiring a military leader as he had an impolitic king. His quick flight left his supporters leaderless and stunned. The one time in the late 17th and 18th century when a Stewart monarch was in a position of authority with a standing army for his Scottish supporters to rally round, he utterly failed in both tactical ability and martial spirit. He ordered his loyal troops from Scotland and then abandoned them without a fight. Royalist Scotland, in the process of becoming Jacobite Scotland, thus left denuded of regular troops, found itself in a position that had been seen before and was to become all too familiar; it had strong feelings for the Stewart line and a variety of concrete issues inclining it towards that camp, but no regular troops, few dependable and experienced leaders and, of course, only the Gaels, largely from the traditional west Highland area, as the reliable military support for this point of view.

In March 1689 when James landed in Ireland to join the bitter civil and religious war there, he led his Franco-Irish army against William and his force that was composed Englishmen, Ulstermen, Dutchmen, Scots, French Huguenots, Prussians, Danes and Swedes. William's eventual Irish success was to be mirrored in Scotland, but not until the royalists had scored their first big victory as Jacobites.

The most active leader of James' faction in Scotland was John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, a distant relation of the

great Montrose. In March of 1689 at the newly formed Convention in Edinburgh, Dundee saw that events were not going well. James' letter to that body was highly unsatisfactory and it was obvious that there would be no resistance in England. In these dark circumstances Dundee quit the capital and led the troop of horse that he had previously commanded to the safety of the Highland line. From there he commenced a small-scale guerrilla war of quick movement and attempted to raise a pro-Stewart force from the northeastern Lowlands and the Highlands.

Easily avoiding his opponent, the solid but uninspiring Major-General Hugh MacKay, an old comrade in arms in the Low Countries, Dundee pushed through to Inverness. He found it already held for James by Coll MacDonnell, the Chief of the MacDonnells of Keppoch. Along with his kindred the Keppoch chief led the MacDonalds of Glencoe and some Camerons. This force had just inflicted heavy damage in a raid on the Clan Chattan whose lands lay on the path from Lochaber to Inverness. The previous year, at Mulroy, Coll MacDonnell had defeated his enemy Lauchlan MacIntosh, the Chief of Clan Chattan, in Scotland's last clan battle and when Dundee led his troops into that northern burgh, Keppoch was enjoying this year's twin victory over MacIntosh and Inverness. Coll's spirits were high and he held a special grudge against the burghers of Inverness so the town was in a dangerous position. Dundee's timely arrival saved Inverness from the certainty of the heavy tax that Coll was levying on the town and from the possible excesses of the Gaels if Inverness refused to pay. After a meeting with Graham, Keppoch and his followers went home to deposit the spoils of their victory and Dundee moved off to a raid on Perth where he



collected a tax and replaced his troops' tired mounts.

From the success in Perth he moved to Lochaber where he found the clans gathering. At this rendezvous he was met by Donald MacDonald, Tutor of Benbecula, his ward, the 16 year old Captain of Clan Ranald, Allan MacDonald, and 500 men of Clan Ranald. Also present were the MacDonnells of Keppoch under Coll MacDonnell, the Sleat kindred under Donald MacDonald, the son of Sir Donald, the chief, the men of Glengarry led by Alasdair Dubh MacDonnell and the MacDonalds of Glencoe following their chief Alasdair MacIain. Added to this impressive Clan Donald gathering was the Clan Cameron under their old and much respected chief, Sir Ewen of Locheil. Also joining the royal army at various points before the coming battle were the MacLeans, Stewarts of Appin, the Clan Duncan or Robertsons and assorted segments of other clans such as a small MacLeod contingent under MacLeod of Raasay, some MacGregors, MacNabbs, MacFarlanes, MacKinnons, MacLauchlans, MacNaughtons, Grants of Glenmoriston, Stewarts of Atholl and the MacNeills of Barra (this last kindred probably arrived and served with their Hebridean neighbours in the Clan Ranald regiment). In a letter to Iain Breack MacLeod of Dunvegan, Dundee describes the raising of the clans:

I have called all the clannes - Captain of Glenranald [sic. Clan Ranald] is near us these several dayes, the Laird of Baro is there with his men. I am persuaded Sr. Donald is there by this. McClean lands tomorrow in Morven certainly Apin, Glenco, Lochell, Glengairie, Keppoch are all raidy. Sir Alexr. and Large have been here all this time with me so that I hope we will go out of Lochaber about thre thousand; you may judge what we will get in Stratharig, Badenoch, Atholl, Marr & the Duke of Gordon's lands besides the loyal shires of Baniff, Aberdeen, Merns, Angus, Pearth and Stirling... I shall only tell you that if you hasten not to land your men I am of opinion you will have little occasion to do the King great service for if he

land in the West of Scotland you will come  
too late ... 61

Notably, Dundee's expectations were totally realised in regard to the west Highland kindreds and in all other respects he was quite over-optimistic.

The many reasons behind this west Highland support for the Stewarts have been discussed above.<sup>62</sup> Here, it is only necessary to add that these conservative Gaels had special reason to fear that a victory for William and Presbyterianism would mean the restoration of the power of the Earl of Argyll and his Clan Campbell and with that, the return to him of the lands and superiorities used so effectively against them in the past.

Jockeying for position, Dundee's force played a game of cat and mouse with MacKay. During this period Coll MacDonnell of Keppoch and his clan slipped away from the royal force and attacked their enemies in the Clan Chattan, burning MacIntosh's castle of Dunachton to the ground and carrying off a considerable amount of spoil. Dundee was incensed when he learned that his followers had committed this outrage without his knowing. He called Coll before the assembled chiefs and said he would rather serve as a common soldier among disciplined troops than command such men as he, who seemed to make it his business to draw the hatred of the country down on him; Dundee added that although Coll had committed these outrages in revenge of his own private quarrel, it would be believed that he had acted on Dundee's orders. And he demanded that Keppoch leave the

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61. Ms 2130, Donald Gregory's notes, p.333.

62. See above, pp.58-85.

army at once.<sup>63</sup>

Because historians have often tended to write-off the motives of clans like the Clan Ranald and its allies such as the MacDonnells of Keppoch and Glencoe (especially in 1689), it seems reasonable to look more closely at this case. The Keppoch chief is often cited as a perfect model of "one significant segment" of Dundee's support that

was derived from groups [kindreds] which were at best marginal and at worst positively criminal within the context of the society of the Gaelic speaking Highlands. Here the prize example is Coll Macdonald of Keppoch, known all too accurately as "Coll of the cows" 64

Certainly, Coll MacDonnell of Keppoch fits this description in one sense, but from the Gaelic point of view more needs to be said in order fully to understand his actions and those of his kindred. First, as in so many other cases, the superiorities of his kindred's traditional lands were held by another. In this case it was the MacIntosh chief of Clan Chattan and the MacDonnells of Keppoch had for many years held their lands by the sword against MacIntosh's claims. So, from the day of his birth the future Keppoch chief was on an inevitable collision course with the Clan Chattan and the authorities that backed it. If Coll was a good chief to his clan then he must be at variance with those who would deprive his people of their lands. Secondly, because of this superiority issue, and on the advice of George Gordon, the Marquis of Huntly, the young Coll had journeyed to Inverness in 1682 to visit MacIntosh in an attempt

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63. Norman H. MacDonald, The Clan Ranald of Lochaber, a History of the MacDonalds or MacDonells of Keppoch, (Edinburgh: no publisher or date given), p.27.

64. Bruce Lenman, The Jacobite Risings in Britain 1689-1746, (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1980), p.44.



to settle the issue. MacIntosh, using his power as Justiciary and acting with the approval of the Magistrates of Inverness, simply jailed the young man in the burgh's tollbooth. Eventually, Coll was released when Huntly petitioned the Privy Council over this "unjust" imprisonment. Thereafter the young Keppoch had a special grudge against MacIntosh, his Clan Chattan and Inverness to increase the basic hostility that still existed over the superiorities.<sup>65</sup> In this respect it must be remembered that Inverness and the Clan Chattan were the only two targets over which Dundee and Coll ever disagreed. Certainly, the Keppoch chief's personal ill-will was a factor in 1689 and it is equally true that this made him something of an unreliable lieutenant, but he was acting in a manner consistent with his kindred's needs and not simply as some uncontrollable barbarian lost to any form of larceny. Here, a related point must also be made; Coll's undisputed talents in lifting cattle were, for the most part, highly prized by Dundee himself. Indeed, it was Dundee who gave Coll the proud soubriquet Colla nam Bo or "Coll of the Cows", in appreciation of his ability to seek out hidden cattle and thus replenish the royal army's meat supply.<sup>66</sup> It must be remembered that Dundee clashed with Coll only over the wasting of the Clan Chattan lands, not Coll's general skill as a cattle reiver. Moreover, it is noteworthy that this proud young chief surprised many by humbly begging his Commander's pardon, stating that would not have attacked MacIntosh's lands if he had not thought him to be the king's enemy as well as his own. Coll said he was sorry and he pledged his obedience in the

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65. MacDonald, Clan Ranald of Lochaber, op.cit., p.23.

66. Ibid., p.27. Moreover, it has been recorded that Coll had the "hearty support" and assistance of Allan MacDonald, the young Captain of Clan Ranald, in these raids. Donald MacDonald, Clan Donald, (Loanhead: MacDonald Publishers, 1978), p.383.

future. Dundee accepted this apology and Keppoch kept his word.<sup>67</sup> This humble and reasonable reaction to Dundee's sharp criticism on Coll's part leads to the final point regarding Keppoch and his kindred. They were not simply out in 1689 so Coll could steal things or gain revenge against his personal enemies. To imply this<sup>68</sup> is to disregard the superiorities issue, Coll's modest apology to Dundee and the weight of the entire history of the MacDonnells of Keppoch. This kindred had always been involved in conservative west Highland causes from the Lordship through the Montrose wars and it was to be equally active in 1715 and 1745. This uniform record of attachment to a certain collective point of view is strong evidence that the men of Keppoch would have followed Dundee in 1689 - as did every other surviving branch of the Clan Donald - whether Coll MacDonnell held a personal grudge or not. All this is not to deny the attractive nature of other people's cattle, booty and/or revenge, but these were only partial factors in the west Highlander's motivation; they are best seen along with undoubted conservative Gaelic objectives and royalist sentiment.

An interesting skirmish occurred as the Highland forces gathered. This incident, reported by Colin Lindsay, 3rd Earl of Balcarres, is useful because it offers a good description in miniature of the Highland method of war at the time. As the young Sir John MacLean of Duart led a party of 200 MacLeans to the royal standard they were cut off by 300 "English dragouns". Balcarres recorded that as soon as the MacLeans perceived their enemy's approach,

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67. Drummond, ed. op.cit., p.197.

68. As Bruce Lennan does, op.cit., p.44.



they threw away their plaids as their custom is and run to the hill where they drew up: He who commanded the dragoons finding they could not ride up to the hill, which the highlanders no sooner perceived but with sword in hand fell down upon them, killed 14 and a Captain, put the rest to flight, and thereafter came and joined Dundie who was marching to Lochabane. 69

The serious battle finally came about when Patrick Stewart of Ballechin, bailie to the Marquess of Atholl, disobeyed his superior's orders and seized Blair Castle for King James, thus gaining control of the central Highland's main north-south route through Atholl and the Pass of Killiecrankie for Dundee. This forced MacKay's hand; he rushed to Atholl via Killiecrankie from the Lowland side. When Dundee learned of these developments he also hurried to Atholl. Throughout the period when Dundee was raising his force and playing the game of manoeuvre with his foes, the speed of his troop of horse and later its continuing speed when combined with the fleet Highlanders had given the royal army a distinct advantage over the plodding MacKay. This seldom mentioned ability to move quickly was to be instrumental in setting the scene in Atholl in favour of the Gaels.

The Highland force won the race to Atholl, thus gaining the all-important tactical ability to choose the ground for the coming battle. So, on 27th July 1689 when MacKay's force finally filed out of the Pass of Killiecrankie into Atholl it was exactly where Dundee wanted, on low ground, just slightly clear of the bottle-neck mouth of the pass and immediately below the hill where Dundee's massed Gaels stood in battle ready. Dundee had decided against ambushing his enemies as they wound through the Pass of Killiecrankie because he feared a majority of that force would escape the trap being either on



one side or the other of the defile. Instead, he chose to allow MacKay's troops to march completely through the pass into Atholl and there, with only the narrow and easily closed pass as a ready means of escape, he would spring his trap.

It worked. Dundee understood the tactical strengths and limitations of the Gaels; he had trained them in his methods of war that took advantage of their abilities and he used these capacities well. The two forces faced each other for quite some time, MacKay unable to advance up the hill or, because of the narrow pass at his back, break ranks and retreat; Dundee, in control of the entire situation, waiting until he was ready to strike. After several hours of tense waiting, when the sun dropped down behind the Highland force into the eyes of the nervous soldiers, Dundee ordered the advance. The Gaels did well, advancing slowly in their clan-regiments, maintaining discipline despite a withering fire from two of MacKay's regiments and serious losses to the kindreds that happened to occupy their field of fire. The Highlanders held to their slow advance until quite close to their foe's line. There, on orders, they discharged their fire-arms, dropped them and with a great shout rushed into the ranks of MacKay's troops who were clumsy, frightened and therefore having difficulty screwing their old-fashioned plug bayonets into their weapons' muzzles. While the musketeers still struggled to insert their bayonets the Gaels broke in amongst them with two-handed claymores, Lochaber axes or broadsword and targe. The carnage was terrific and the Highlanders' victory complete.

The author of the memoirs of Viscount Dundee, an eye-witness to the battle, has left the following account of the slaughter.

Then the Highlanders fired, threw down their fusils, rushed in upon the enemy with sword, targe, and pistol, who did not maintain their ground two minutes after the Highlanders were amongst them; and I dare be bold to say, that were scarce ever such strokes given in Europe as were given that day by the Highlanders.

Many of General MacKay's officers and soldiers were cut down through the skull and neck to the very breast; others had skulls cut off above their ears like night-caps; some soldiers had both their bodies and cross-belts cut through at one blow; pikes and small swords were cut like willows; ... 70

Then, at the moment of supreme victory, and according to one source, while leading the Clan Ranald regiment in a follow-up sweep,<sup>71</sup> Dundee was felled by a single shot. He died on the field and so, despite the total victory at Killiecrankie, with Dundee's death, so too died the Jacobite hopes for the period.

Because the advance of the Gaels was slowed up by the booty in MacKay's baggage train, and more importantly and seldom mentioned, because of the lack of direction and confusion resulting from Dundee's death, MacKay was able to rally the few survivors of his decimated army and escape over the hills to Perth. He wisely chose not to try to use the pass because it was now a death-trap swarming with Jacobite Athollmen. Few of the soldiers that chose that escape route survived.

Victory had been total, but it had also been costly for the Highlanders. While only two of MacKay's regiments had stood their ground and fired with effect, both had done serious damage to the Gaels; these losses fell especially heavily on the daoin-uaisle of each clan who traditionally led their respective kinsmen into battle. In the first volley young Donald MacDonald of Sleat lost five cousins

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70. Memoirs of the Lord Viscount Dundee, by an Officer of the Army, (London: Jonas Brown, 1714), p.27.

71. Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan or Family of MacDonald from Somerlett, ... to the Present Period; more particularly as Relating to ... the Clanranald, Anon., (Edinburgh: Duncan Stevenson & Co., 1819), p.145, (hereafter, Book of 1819).



and no fewer than 16 of the Glengarry gentlemen were cut down in the charge.<sup>72</sup> This shows that a well trained and disciplined force could do a Highland army great damage, especially to its important leadership, if that force stood its ground and fired effectively. But on this occasion victory was complete for the Gaels, even in areas where the musketeers acted well. The heavy Glengarry losses did not stop that kindred's advance and once among the musketeers the men of Glengarry gained quick revenge. Donald Gorm MacDonnell, the brother to the Glengarry chief is said to have killed 18 of the enemy with his two-handed claymore before he too fell.<sup>73</sup> Specific figures relating to the Clan Ranald losses have not survived, but this kindred was in the thick of the battle. It charged in the centre of the Highland army between the Stewarts of Appin and the seriously blooded Glengarry regiment.

"I hope tho we have lost the field we have wine the day".<sup>74</sup> So wrote J. Lochart to George, Lord Melvin, when informing him of the Battle of Killiecrankie, Dundee's death and MacKay's escape. He was correct. Following the battle, command of the Jacobite army fell to Colonel Alexander Cannon who failed to provide the sort of leadership needed for a Highland army. He was unsuitable in two areas of central importance. Firstly, his personality was not strong enough to keep the various kindreds together and even the staunch old royalist Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochell left the army, although he did leave many of his clansmen under the standard led by his son. Secondly, Cannon appears to have learned nothing from Dundee about

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72. Donald MacDonald, Clan Donald, op.cit., p.354.

73. Ibid.

74. GD26/13/23.



the tactical strengths of Highland troops. In marked contrast to the well-thoughtout tactics of Killiecrankie, Cannon soon embroiled the triumphant Gaels in a battle at Dunkeld that used none of their tactical strengths and, indeed, gave notable advantages to their religious extremist foes, the Cameronians. It was a hard fought house-to-house battle with the clans moving against a solidly entrenched enemy. Despite what was, by all accounts, a valiant attempt by the Gaels in a theatre of war that was totally alien to them, and despite the death of the Cameronian commander, the Highland army was fought to a standstill. At this point in the campaign, especially after the death of Dundee, a standstill was as good as a defeat. The path south was blocked and the Jacobite army retired to Atholl and the Highlands.

Before disbanding, the Highland chiefs signed a Bond of Association, wherein they pledged to continue in their support of King James and to offer one another aid in the event of attack.<sup>75</sup> All of the major kindreds from the west Highland conservative camp were represented on the Bond. Donald MacDonald, tutor of Benbecula, signed for his young ward, Allan MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald. From their mountain and island fastnesses the Gaels maintained this attitude of defiance.

Meanwhile, Allan, the young chief, had been sent off to France with his brother Ranald, to find sanctuary at the court of St. Germain. The young Allan was to continue his education that had started under the roof of his cousin, Donald MacDonald of Castle Borge, the Tutor of Benbecula, and had continued under private tutors

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75. GD26/8/30.

in Inverness. The young Clan Ranald chieftains furthered their education in France and saw military service in the French army.

Several methods were tried to subdue the rebellious Gaels in the west Highlands and Islands. Firstly, a policy of force and occupation, loosely based on General Monck's old tactics was attempted. After the government defeat at Killiecrankie and the following collapse of the Jacobite campaign, Major-General MacKay had collected a new force and pushed through the central Highlands. He stopped at the western end of the Great Glen at Inverlochy and on the site of the old Cromwellian fort he started building a new government stronghold which he called Fort William. The old Cromwellian commander, Colonel John Hill, who had served there under Monck in his effective period of Highland rule, was again put among the western clans at Inverlochy and ordered to control them.

A significant aspect of this post-Killiecrankie policy, and one that has received little attention, is that not only was Inverlochy fortified, but also several other west Highland posts and castles were garrisoned. Clearly, this is something of a carry-over from General Monck's earlier policy, but in 1689 the majority of government attention fell on the west Highland area that had been instrumental in the previous rising and not the entire Highland region as had been the case under Monck. Even during the Restoration period, an era when Monck had become the Duke of Albemarle and still held considerable influence in government circles, establishment troops had been stationed in the west Highlands. For example, in 1671 William Crichtoune, "commander of the party in the north", had instructed Captain Robert Midetoun, "commander in Skie", that "as Clanronald has paid his cess, [Crichtoune] has ordered the party

quartered in these [Clan Ranald's] parts to remove and march to Inverness".<sup>77</sup> And even in the months immediately preceding the rising led by Dundee in 1689, there were troops in the area. On 23rd May 1689, Lord Doune ordered the arrest of the Clan Ranald cadet, Allan MacDonald of Moror, and in Skye the arrest of Donald MacDonald of Castleton, a chieftain in the Sleat branch of Clan Donald, because

despite the quarterings of soldiers upon them they continue to refuse payment of arrears of taxes due by them, and also for their imprisonment in the tolbooth of Inverness. 78

Apparently, the orders for their arrest were not implemented because of the closely following Jacobite rebellion; certainly, Donald MacDonald of Castleton escaped arrest. He was known to be with his clan at the Battle of Killiecrankie and served throughout the campaign as his chief's aide-de-camp.<sup>79</sup>

Following the collapse of the Jacobite rising, troops were again sent into this area. Parts of this policy are explained in a letter of James Johnston, Secretary of State for Scotland, dated 14th March 1692.

I propose that four Companies only of the 5 independent companies be reduced; ffor I considder that all the Garrisons that will be needed northward, which are one at Fort William and one at Inverness and four or five betwixt them, by wch the Communication betwixt the north highlands & the west highlands may be intercepted all these I say, and one also which seems needfull at Ruthven of Badanenoch ... only it remains that one be at ffinlarig to bridle the Mcgregors. 80

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77. GD201/4/6.

78. GD176/626.

79. Donald MacDonald, Clan Donald, op.cit., p.420.

80. SP3/1/pp.9-10.



One of the "four or five litle Garrisons" that lay between Fort William and Inverness was the Glengarry Castle of Invergarry which was occupied by troops from 1692 to about 1704.<sup>81</sup> An important part of this Highland policy, and one that the above letter does not make clear, is the close attention given the west Highland and Island kindreds, the clans that Johnston was trying to separate from the northern kindreds with his string of "litle Garrisons ... betwixt the north Highlands & the west Highlands".

The "west Highlands" and especially the kindreds who had been active under Dundee were well covered with garrisons. Firstly, the major fortress at Fort William was situated in the middle of the west Highlands among the major members of the conservative camp there. As was seen above, the castle of the MacDonnells of Glengarry was garrisoned; moreover, Castle Stalker, the old hunting lodge of James IV, that was also the island fortress of the Stewarts of Appin, was occupied and from it the Appin Stewarts and their neighbours, the MacDonalds of Glencoe, could be watched.<sup>82</sup> Troops were also sent to the Isle of Skye and other areas and, finally, it will be seen that the Clan Ranald stronghold off the coast of Moidart, Castle Tioram, was also used as a base for government troops.

A document in the Eglinton collection is of interest as it helps to explain how government troops entered the west Highlands as well as how they moved around, were kept supplied and reinforced. On 7th May, 1690, it was agreed that

for so mikle as the Lords of his majesties give  
counsell, having in designe to send some forces,

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81. Donald MacDonald, Clan Donald, op.cit., pp.355-56.

82. GD26/9/274/13td Oct. 1690 and John & Duncan Stewart, Stewarts of Appin, op.cit., p.121.

for the west Heighlands, under the Command of  
major ffergusonne, having impowered the sd.  
Hugh Montgomerie To agree with the number of  
twelve good and sufficient herring boats  
haveing ane skipper and four men to each boat,  
with sufficient furniture for such ane  
voyadge. To the end they may be subservient  
to the sd. Major ffergusonne in Landing men  
or other wise. 83

This policy did not go smoothly at first. The Gaels were  
still in open rebellion and they had not received permission from  
James VII to make their peace with the powers in Edinburgh and London.  
In the summer of 1690 two frigates were sent to the Isle of Skye to  
quell the MacDonalds of Sleat. Negotiations between the ship's  
commander and the Sleat gentry having failed, the ships fired on Sir  
Donald MacDonald's residence at Armadale while a party of troops was  
put ashore to "reduce" the rebellious men of Skye. Unlike the  
later situation in Glencoe, the MacDonalds of Sleat were armed, fore-  
warned and in the mood for a fight. The landing party was attacked,  
split into two sections and both were completely destroyed.<sup>84</sup>

But, eventually, the Gaels proved to be somewhat ready to  
accept the status quo since for the moment it was clear that no new  
rising would be attempted. Even the recently triumphant MacDonalds  
of Skye made some sort of arrangement with the government, although  
details are lacking.<sup>85</sup> Despite equally sketchy information, it  
appears that the Clan Ranald was not active during this period,  
although it is certain that none of the recently rebellious clans was  
repentant or cowed.

Here, it should be noted that these clans no longer felt

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83. GD3/E10/896.

84. Donald MacDonald, Clan Donald, op.cit., p.422.

85. Ibid., p.423.

isolated from one another as they had done during the Linn nan Creach, the period from 1545-1644 after the failure of the last rising that attempted to restore the Lordship of the Isles until Montrose pulled them together; during this earlier period of crisis, lacking an accepted central authority, the clans had turned on each other and at the same time several had been eliminated one by one by the central government. Montrose had pulled the survivors of the old conservative block of western clans together into something of a united front and, clearly, this feeling of unity (less notable and impressive than the Lordship, but nevertheless unified to a significant degree) extended into the post-Killiecrankie period. This was not only seen in the list of clans that did choose to rally to Dundee's standard, but it is also expressed in the Bond of Association signed at Blair Atholl on 24th August 1689. All the Scottish members of Clan Donald signed the Bond, including, Benbecula (for the young Allan of Clan Ranald), Sleat, Glengarry, Keppoch, Glencoe and Largie, along with the Clan Cameron, MacLeans, Stewarts of Appin and MacNeills of Barra. These kindreds had been and were to continue to be the central core of the conservative west Highland community of interest and along with certain other Gaels of traditional inclination such as the Murrays, Stewarts and Robertsons of Atholl, certain Badenoch kindreds, the MacNaughtons, MacLauchlans and a few other smaller kindreds, were to continue as a force in British politics.

This study takes the position that the Bond of Association signed at Blair Atholl was a significant marker in the history of Gaelic Scotland. It expressed the united approach to a political situation of a group of people who shared a common culture and political position and who, since Montrose had re-united them, would continue to



attempt to influence events together. In the post-Killiecrankie era they were not crushed physically or downtrodden spiritually. They remained potent and rebellious; part of that attitude stemmed from the belief that they were united and thus no longer alone to confront a powerful central government. The Bond, itself, expressed this sentiment:

In case anie of the Rebels [government supporters] shall asalt or attaque anie of the above persons [the listed clan chiefs] betwixt the dait heirof and the forsd day of Randevuzie [sic. Rendezvous], wee doe all solemnlie promise to assist on aneothr to the outmost of our power. 86

This is not a piece of Victorian romanticism; it is an expression of unity by the leading elements of an ancient culture.

The Clan Ranald remained a resolute member of this group. Its two young chieftains, Allan and Ranald, were in French military service in close contact with the Jacobite Court at St. Germain, and in the Hebrides the kindred was in the hands of the conservative Donald MacDonald of Castle Borge, Tutor of Benbecula. Donald was working to preserve the kindred's lands from forfeiture. In this struggle he enjoyed support from a somewhat unexpected source, Argyll, the chief of Clan Campbell. Archibald Campbell, the 10th Earl of Argyll, appears to have actually refused to take control of the Clan Ranald estate. On 2nd March 1693, the Secretary of State for Scotland, James Johnston, wrote that, "Argyle will neither consent to the Justiciary nor take Clanranald's Estate".<sup>87</sup> Earlier in an even less clear reference, Johnston had stated that Argyll, "will not hear of Clanranald's Estate".<sup>88</sup> Information concerning this situation

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86. GD26/8/30.

87. SP3/1/2 March 1693.

88. SP3/1/14 February 1693.

and Argyll's motives is sketchy and probably will remain so until the closed Argyll Muniments are opened. Argyll, who under William held the superiorities to most of the Clan Ranald land, may have felt it unwise to press for more at the moment or may have used his restraint in some manner to trade for Clan Ranald support, or at least lack of opposition, in some other scheme. At any rate, the estate was not forfeited.

During this same period there is ample evidence that the Clan Ranald territories were occupied and that the stronghold on the island off the coast of Moidart, Castle Tioram, was used as a base for the government troops. This evidence is in the form of a series of discharges that date from 13th November 1692, when James Dunbar signed for "Lieutenant Kennedie commander of the party quartering on the Laird of Moydart's Lands",<sup>89</sup> through 1697 when John Dow MacEachen, Clanranald's officer in Arisaig signed "to the Garisone of Castletirholme" and 1698<sup>90</sup> to as late as 1702 and 1703 when "Lieutenant Robert Young in Brigadier Maitland's Regiment and Governor of Castell Tirholm (having commission from Dougall Campbell, Collector of the bishopric of the Isles and synod of Argyll)"<sup>91</sup> carried out the transactions. These funds collected from the Clan Ranald estate were used to finance the Fort William garrison. As Johnston, the Secretary of State for Scotland, explained to Colonel John Hill, the commander at Inverlochy, in a letter dated 7th December 1692:

I have got you a yearly pass from 150£ Sterling out of Clanranalds estate of which you are your self to be Collector as well as of the rest of

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89. GD201/1/155.

90. GD201/3/52.

91. GD201/3/58 & 61.



the estate which you are to apply to the necessities of your Garrison. 92

This documentation regarding the government occupation of west Highland castles points to an interesting area development in the post-1689 period and a development somewhat ominous for the Gaels. Castles Tioram, Stalker, Invergarry, Cairnburg (off the coast of Mull), Duart and Mingarry were all either occupied specifically by government troops or their Clan Campbell allies. These old Gaelic sanctuaries had become unsatisfactory as places of defence for the Gaels against an enemy that increasingly used sea power and its ship-based artillery but, on the other hand, these old fortresses were still quite useful and effective as safe bases for occupying forces who attempted to observe and control local Gaelic people who had no cannon.

In addition to the use of these various garrison bases - all centred around and directed from Fort William - several other methods were attempted to control the Highlands. One, at least, held some promise; during the above discussed period several attempts were made to buy off the rebellious Gaels. Interestingly, the government contemplated buying up the strife-causing superiorities from magnates like Argyll. In 1690 George MacKenzie of Tarbat, a Highlander who understood the western chiefs well, proposed that the crown buy up the disputed superiorities. Unhappily, implementation of the scheme fell to Sir John Dalrymple, Master of Stair, and John Campbell of Glenorchy, Earl of Breadalbane. Both dabbled with various versions of this scheme but neither succeeded. Neither man was known for his scruples or his close ties with Gaels of the conservative west Highland camp; also, the Privy Council disliked the plan and Colonel



Hill spoke of it (referring to John Campbell of Glenorchy) as setting a fox to keep the geese.<sup>93</sup> In the end nothing came of the scheme which, with a firm but fair hand from Fort William, could have held promise. Eventually, something very different, very telling and very harmful was put into effect.

You know in general that these Toops [sic. troops] posted at Inverness and Inverlochie will be ordered to take in the House of Innergarie, and to destroy intearly the Country of Lochaber, Locheals Lands, Kippochs, Glengaries, Apine, and Glenco... I assure you your Power shall be full enough, and I hope the Soldiers will not trouble the Government with Prisoners. 94

So wrote Sir John Dalrymple, Master of Stair, in a letter to Sir Thomas Livingstone and Colonel John Hill, Governor of Fort William on 7th January 1692. The quote speaks for itself. The plan was to destroy completely the MacDonnells of Glengarry and Keppoch, the Clan Cameron, the MacDonalds of Glencoe and the Stewarts of Appin; it only needs to be added that Stair's correspondence makes it certain that the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald and Sleat were originally included in his scheme to "root out the whole lot",<sup>95</sup> but that both were considered too far away and thus too difficult to be surprised. Moreover, Allan of Clan Ranald was out of harm's way in France. This project is notable for its vast and bloody intent and also for its close resemblance to the government scheme of 1607 when it had been planned that George, the 6th Earl and 1st Marquis of Huntly, would

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93. GD26/8/64.

94. The Massacre of Glenco, Being a True Narrative, (London: Printed and Sold by B. Biagg, 1703), p.21, from a pamphlet included in "Miscellaneous Tracts, 1689-1704", National Library of Scotland and Donald J. MacDonald, Slaughter under Trust, Glencoe 1692, (London: Robert Hale, 1965), p.81.

95. MacDonald, Slaughter under Trust, op.cit., p.81.

undirtak and bind himselff to extirpat and rute  
oute the Captane of Clan Rannald, with his hole  
clan and thair followaris within the Ilis, or  
Knoydart or Moydart, and also McNeill Barra, with  
his clan, and the hole Clan Donnald in the North. 96

The 1607 plan had been dropped because Huntly was a catholic;<sup>97</sup>  
the 1692 plan was shelved because it was impractical which at least  
indicates that central government was becoming more realistic if not  
more humanitarian. The order of 1692 also shows that unlike most  
recent historians of Scotland who take no notice of the specific  
members of the Jacobite block and their individual histories, the  
government of the period could not afford to be so casual when dealing  
with the conservative Highland clans.

Eventually, when the large-scale plan was dropped, it was  
decided to centre attention of one token clan. This kindred, the  
MacDonalds of Glencoe, was considered ideal because it was small,  
troublesome, easily trapped in its narrow glen, thought to be  
catholic,<sup>98</sup> and MacDonald. Also, the major architect of the plan,  
Stair, felt the Glencoe chief and other MacDonalds had broken the  
recent negotiations with Breadalbane. Johnstone, Secretary of State  
for Scotland, in 1693 reported that Stair

ownes in another letter that he had no kindness  
to Glencoes. The secret of all is, Glenco and  
the other Macdonalds broke the highland nego-  
tiations. 99

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96. Register of Privy Council 1604-1607, Vol. VII, op.cit., p.382.

97. Gregory, op.cit., p.314.

98. The clan was, in fact, episcopalian, but Stair's correspondence shows that he thought it was catholic and, in any case, it should be noted that the Camerons and Stewarts of Appin were known to be episcopalian and yet were included in the original list of targets. It was simply that the "catholic" MacDonalds were seen to be the major offenders and leaders of the troublesome west Highland faction. See William Ferguson, "Religion and the Massacre of Glencoe", The Scottish Historical Review, Vol. 46, (Aberdeen: University Press, 1967), pp.82-87 and Ibid., Vol. 47, pp.203-09.

99. SP3/1/4 August 1693.



If the Chief of Glencoe "M'Ean ... and that tribe" could be separated from the other kindreds, Stair felt it would be a "proper vindication of Public Justice to extirpate that sect of thieves".<sup>100</sup>

This was done. The result was the infamous Massacre of Glencoe, in which 38 members of that clan, including MacIain, the old chief, were murdered. But the plan was largely a failure. Most of the kindred escaped and were sheltered by neighbouring kindreds. The MacDonalds of Glencoe were not "extirpated" and they were not crushed spiritually. The kindred survived to fight in the Jacobite ranks in the later Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745-46. And the Jacobites were able to turn the event into a major propaganda setback for William and his government. But in two respects the Jacobite propaganda has led to erroneous attitudes concerning the event. Firstly, the numbers killed in the massacre were small when compared to other Highland atrocities and, secondly, the Campbell involvement in the actual attack has been over-stated. Although it should be pointed out that the two major Campbell chiefs, Argyll and Breadalbane, both knew of the plan far in advance and probably took part in its formation.<sup>101</sup> The massacre was especially obnoxious because the government troops were ordered to turn on their hosts in the night after having been given hospitality by the Glencoe folk for a fortnight. Gaels of all political shades were appalled and Jacobite sentiment continued to flourish in the area.

Meanwhile, Allan MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald, the man who was to become the leader of the conservative west Highland kindreds, was still being groomed in France by the Jacobite court at

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100. MacDonald, Slaughter under Trust, op.cit., p.81.

101. SP3/1/ 7 December 1692.



St. Germain and the French army. While serving under the Duke of Berwick in the French forces, Allan received a commission and distinguished himself in several major battles against William and the Protestant Confederation.<sup>102</sup> At the Jacobite court he met and married Penelope MacKenzie, daughter of the man who had been Governor of Tangier under Charles II. By all accounts this lady was both beautiful and accomplished. The marriage seems to have been of the most dedicated romantic type; this noteworthy woman and her deep regard for Allan were to play a significant role in the future development of the Clan Ranald.

In a letter, dated 25th June, 1695, from Ostend, Belgium, Allan discusses his pardon, which he felt could be obtained, "upon condition that my friends would give forty thousand pounds str. Beall for my good behavior" and makes his desire to return home clear when he closes saying, "the Lord knows what will come of me if the forty thousand pounds will not doet".<sup>103</sup> During this period Donald MacDonald of Benbecula, the Earl of Argyll and Viscount George MacKenzie of Tarbat had been able to keep the estate free from forfeiture and on 21st July 1696 MacKenzie of Cromartie became surety for Allan's good behaviour. Shortly thereafter Allan, his wife Penelope and his brother Ranald returned.

Allan and Penelope set up court on the most remote of the Clan Ranald possessions, South Uist, in the recently enlarged Castle of Ormiclate and soon this residence was noted throughout Scotland for its hospitality, its hosts and its place as the centre for the

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102. MacDonalds, Clan Donald, Vol. II, op.cit., p.341.

103. Letter, 25th June 1695, from Allan MacDonald, Catholic Archives, Columba House, Edinburgh.

best in the culture of the Gael. The ancient bardic family, the MacMhuirichs, who had served the Lords of the Isles before coming under Clan Ranald protection, held pride of place in the court, but also the kindred's MacIntyre pipers, the local harpist and travelling musicians and artists were encouraged by Allan. The Ormiclate court of Allan and Penelope MacDonald was well described in the Clanranald Book of 1819.

Some time after his marriage Clanranald and his lady returned to Scotland, and arrived in safety at Ormiclate House in South Uist. Though this is one of the remotest of the Western Isles, and far from society, yet so completely did their tempers accord with each other, that their uniform hospitality, polite attention, and affable manners drew company from all parts of the kingdom, and a little court (well befitting that of a chief) was actually formed which made no small noise in the country. 104

This "little court" had a function other than that of hospitality and the overt preservation of the Gaelic culture; and the remote South Uist was an ideal place to meet this very special "company from all parts of the kingdom". From the standpoint of the government Allan's Gaelic court had a quite sinister function, as a centre for Jacobite meetings and intrigue.

Documentation makes it clear that like several of his Clan Ranald ancestors Allan was the leader of the west Highland conservative community of interest and that he was the premier Jacobite agent between St. Germain and the Gaels of the west Highlands and Isles. It is interesting and fitting that Allan chose to use the lively culture of the Gael as a cover for his Jacobite intrigue. What better cover for this intrigue than the very culture Allan hoped to preserve with a Jacobite victory?

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104. Book of 1819, op.cit., p.148.

In 1710 rumours of a French-Jacobite invasion were rife and in several ways Allan MacDonald of Clan Ranald was the focal point of these plans. This situation not only demonstrates the place of importance held by the Captain of Clan Ranald, it also illustrates a variety of other points that were to be central to other Jacobite plans and risings. For all these reasons it is useful to take a closer look at that year's events.

From a series of letters by David Melville, the Earl of Leven to James Douglas, Duke of Queensbury, preserved in the Leven and Melville Muniments, it is possible to reconstruct these events. This correspondence makes it clear that the source of the information was Colonel John Hill, Governor of Fort William, and several "informers" or agents in the west Highlands and Islands. Moreover, it is certain that presbyterian ministers also supplied information to the government<sup>105</sup> and, actually, may have been the above mentioned "informers".

Throughout the period the many great Highland stag hunts caused Leven (and Colonel Hill) recurring worries. These large-scaled hunts employed a great number of clansmen who drove deer towards a narrow pass where the chiefs and other important men waited to slay the animals. In the summer of 1710 there were at least two such great hunts, one given by the Marquis of Huntly and the other by the Duke of Atholl. Hill and Leven feared that both screened possible Jacobite intrigue and Leven wished that this practice of the "great men" in the Highlands

were putt a stope too, for however innocent the  
practise may be yett it is hard to distinguish

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105. See below, p. 417, ft.nt. 2.



betwixt jest and earnest and altho - some thousands of men may come together with armes with noe other designe, but to hunt the staig, yet at other tymes such a rendezvous may be upon a worse designe. 106

Given the intensive Jacobite activity that summer it seems these suspicions were justified: certainly in 1715 they would be.

By 28th April 1710 Leven was convinced that plans for an invasion were complete. He reported that the heads of several kindreds had gone to Ireland to escape being taken up "before the arrival of the Pretender".<sup>107</sup> In early May he stated,

I was informed that the Capt. of Clanronald was made choice off to be sent to the French king, & since tht I ame told tht it is given out in his countrey tht he is gone for Ireland. I am indeavouring to know whither he be certainly absent from his own house, and if he be, its probable tht the report of his being gone to Ireland is but to cover & conseal his being in France. 108

In June Leven reported that his earlier suspicions had been correct, that "the Cpt. of Clanronald was chosen by the other heads of clans" to go to the French court and Leven said that his

informant confirms the truth of his being gone ther, & tht he is to return wt those troopes tht are designed for the taking of inverlochie [Fort William] he informed me also tht he was told tht all the considerable men, both in the highlands & in the low countrey of that partie, were entered unto ane association to stand by one another, & in case of things going wrong wt them. 109

The plan was that Allan MacDonald of Clan Ranald was to land in the west Highlands with 2,000 French troops and to capture Fort William while at the same time James Edward Stuart, the old pretender, would

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106. GD26/9/450/11 March 1710.

107. GD26/9/450/28 April 1710.

108. GD26/9/450/ 6 May 1710.

109. GD26/9/450/16 June 1710.

embark with 3 or 4,000 men and land near Aberdeen. Soon after this original Aberdeenshire landing a further 3,000 were to be sent to the same area. And, Inverlochy having been taken, the clans were to rise and all forces were to converge on Edinburgh. The importance of Fort William to both the government and the Jacobite Highlanders was underlined when Leven stated

my informer says further tht it was agreed to by the pretender tht his freinds in the highlands should not rise in advance till Inverlochie was taken, & He himself landed. 110

Throughout the period, especially in May and June, there were reports of unidentified "privateers" prowling the western islands.<sup>111</sup> It seems that several Jacobite agents were landed by these ships. One such agent, Captain John Ogilvie,

was fully instructed from the court at St. Germaine to thr freinds here, he went through the highlands, & did converse with most of the considerable men thr. The chiefe desyne of his errand was to incourage thm. to continue firm in the good inclinations to the pretender & to assure thm tht the pretender was fully resolved to come amongst thm tht summer & vindicate.(as he called it) his own right. This gentleman was to know wht the pretender was to expect from thm upon this his undertaking. 112

In July Leven was sufficiently worried about the Jacobite plans that he decided to initiate a series of improvements to strengthen Inverlochy. He felt the fortress was basic to governmental security and policy in the Highlands because it was "the most central of any wt regard to the whole highlands". Inverlochy had always been considered strong enough to repel any attack launched by the Gaels themselves, but Leven feared it would not stand in the face of the

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110. GD26/9/450/16 June & 26 June 1710.

111. GD26/9/450/30 May 1710.

112. GD26/9/450/26 June 1710.

French and their more sophisticated weaponry. He requested that "Mr. Edwards the ingeneer" be rushed to Fort William with workers and that an additional 500 troops be transferred to the garrison. Finally, he added that he felt nothing would more strengthen the government's hand in the area than "a squadron of her Majties ships on that coast". This naval force might stop the enemy's landing and prevent "the Islanders" from coming to the mainland and if that were effectively done, "it will disappoint them of near a fourth part of the men tht are expected to compose ane highland army". Leven closed saying that he felt it was "very proper tht some method were taken" to learn exactly what had become of the Captain of Clan Ranald.<sup>113</sup>

As the summer wore on fewer reports were received and these infrequent accounts were of a less urgent nature. By 13th October the Captain of Clan Ranald had returned, the invasion plan clearly having been abandoned for the season. At this date Allan MacDonald had retired to "some of the Islands whr. he has interest" and was, therefore, unavailable to Leven's agent. However, Leven stated that Captain John Ogilvie was again active in the Highlands where he had met

the Captain of Clanranald, Sir Donald Mcdonald, Stewart of Appine, Lochyel, Glencoe, and wt soume of the Mcphersons, he says Likewayes tht the messr from france [Ogilvie] told him tht he had be wt several noblemen, & gentlemen in the Lowlands. 114

Clearly, the intrigues continued but the Rising of 1710 was never to be.

The Jacobite machinations were to endure, fostering events that were to hasten the deterioration of traditional Gaelic culture. But before continuing with these political developments, it is proper to take a closer look at the structure of that Highland culture that existed at the start of the 18th century.

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113. GD26/9/450/4 July 1710.

114. GD26/9/450/13 October 1710.



### CHAPTER III

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A comprehension of the structure of this period's Highland society is a necessary foundation for the study of the changes that were to come into the region, and the Clan Ranald provides a good illustration of that structure. The culture of 17th and early 18th century Gaelic Scotland was not Gaeldom in its most pure form. Many significant alterations had come since the first Scots immigrants had arrived from Ireland and since the Lord of the Isles was declared forfeit,<sup>1</sup> but the society of the Highlands of the last half of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th retained much of its traditional appearance. Consequently, it will be helpful to take a close look at land distribution and the structure of the Clan Ranald's hierarchy during this period.

Highland kindreds were divided into four basic levels. First, the chief or in Gaelic the ceann cinnidh, literally, "head of the kindred", next the daoine-uaisle, or the nobles of the clan, then the professionals and finally the commoners. Their functions and inter-relationships as well as the manner in which land was parcelled out to them are the subjects of this and the next three chapters. This particular chapter will focus on the position of "chief" and the various functions carried out by the ceann cinnidh.

In the west Highlands land was distributed in a fairly constant manner. The chief retained some under his personal control. The daoine-uaisle oversaw much of the kindred's territory. By the mid 17th

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1. See above for a sketch of the early factors working to alter Highland society, p.20.

century these clan nobles held land in a variety of ways such as wadsets, tacks and feus. Closely akin to the daoin-uaisle were the kindred's professionals.. These hereditary families filled positions including bard, harper, physician and piper. In terms of prestige, and sometimes land holding, these professionals belonged to duin-uasal class, but that position was based not on birth but on their family's professional standing. Some land was also bestowed on the church. Below these ranks was the remainder of the kindred. These commoners found themselves in varied circumstances; some were joint tenants who held land directly from the chief; others were roughly at this same level but held their parcel of land from an individual duin-uasal; and, finally, below these were the sub-tenants or cottars. Lands were generally sublet to the commoners in oral agreements.

Anciently, a chief did not own his kindred's lands. He was said to oversee the clan and its land; if found unsatisfactory, as was the case with the Clan Ranald's Dugall MacRanald, the chief could be deposed and another acceptable guardian elected in his stead. This is how the kin-based system of succession worked. If there was a choice to be made, the clan made it in its own way; if no crisis arose primogeniture was used in Gaeldom as was generally the case in the rest of Scotland. But while the system of succession could be different, the system of land holding was feudal in both Highland and Lowland Scotland. Even during periods of crisis, such as that when John Moydartach led the Clan Ranald and its west Highland allies to war to preserve his elected position and their ancient right to select the leader of their choice, and in other periods when the Clan Ranald held its lands "by the sword", the system of land

holding remained the same on the ground. Below the chief, whose personal position was in question due to the different systems of succession, the kindred's lands were distributed in a feudal fashion.

As time passed, especially after the 1609 Statutes of Iona and the several alterations in the tactical status quo in favour of the central authority that were contemporary with those Statutes,<sup>2</sup> the leadership of the Clan Ranald saw the wisdom of appearing to operate within the system of succession recognised by Lowland authorities and, in any case, no new crisis of leadership like that with Dugall MacRanald arose. Never again did the Clan Ranald oppose the powers in Edinburgh concerning its right to depose its chosen chief; it was not necessary. But there is no doubt that the kindred retained its belief in its right to choose a chief. This is seen in 1725 when the kindred decided, solely through its own methods, between Donald MacDonald of Benbecula and Donald MacDonald of Kinlochmoidart, both of whom were competing for the position of Captain of Clan Ranald.<sup>3</sup> Although, here it must be pointed out that choosing a new chief after the old line has died out is quite different from and much less difficult than deposing one and selecting another.

During the long period from the 1520 deposition of Dugall MacRanald until the 1725 contest between Benbecula and Kinlochmoidart, the kindred clearly retained the belief that it had the right to oversee and depose any unsatisfactory chief and that its chief was the guardian, not the owner, of the clan's lands. But no such dispute arose and for a considerable period the position of "chief" passed from father to son in a manner consistent with both kin-based

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2. See above, pp.48-49.

3. See below, pp.370-72.



and Lowland methods. This long running practice, coupled with the ever growing power of Lowland government to force its will, eventually led to something of a tacit acquiescence in the feudal definition of land ownership. With each peaceful and accepted transfer from father to son of the title, Captain of Clanranald, and with each improvement in the Lowland's strategic position vis-a-vis the traditional camp in the Highlands, the Edinburgh authority's definition gained ground. Certainly, after 1746, when British jurisdiction entered the Highlands and Islands, the case was closed and the Lowland concept reality.

The MacDonald-MacRuairi amalgamation that was the foundation of the Clan Ranald has been sketched in preceding chapters as has the period up to the Montrose wars. For over 65 years from the 1544 Blair na Leine episode until 1610 the Clan Ranald held its lands for the most part "by the sword" without benefit of feudal charter. This period should not be lightly skipped over. It is comparatively easy to examine a feudal charter that has survived; it is more difficult to assess a period of over 65 years in which the kindred's lack of a feudal charter is equally significant. During this period the authorities revoked John Moydartach's "legal titles" to his lands and gifted them to his many enemies, but the events of the period tell their own story. This host of enemies, even with the support of the crown, utterly failed to impose their will on the Clan Ranald because the people of this kindred continued to support their definition of their own society embodied in the man they had selected as leader. That choice was excellent. Later, George Buchanan singled out John Moydartach and indirectly praised him by calling him "John Muderach, Chief of the Family of the M'Reynolds, a notorious robber [who] had played many foul and monstrous pranks".<sup>4</sup> To have earned such scorn

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4. Donald MacDonald, Clan Donald, op.cit., p.297.

from his kindred's enemies bears witness to his success, that, and the fact that 65 years later the same authorities who had taken away his kindred's feudal charter gave them back to his grandson Donald MacAllan MacDonald, thereby recognising the Clan Ranald's hard fought victory. In that early period central government was not powerful enough to alter the Clan Ranald's position. Eventually, it endorsed that reality with feudal charters. So in 1610 Donald MacAllan, Captain of Clan Ranald, held the feudal titles to his clan's territories. Unfortunately, this pleasing situation would not last and the inability to cope with such matters was the most serious weakness of the various Captains of Clan Ranald.

Donald MacAllan faced a quite different situation from that of his grandfather, the first John Moydartach. Argyll was an even more serious threat. The MacLeods of Lewis, the MacIains of Ardnarmurchan and the MacDonalds of Islay and Kintyre were either gone or in their death throes. The war galleys were being destroyed. A powerful wedge was being driven between the Gaels of Ireland and the west Highlands in Ulster. The increasing effectiveness and use of ship based artillery had vastly reduced the safety afforded by the old Hebridean and west coast strongholds. Better to accept the feudal charters and the additional security they offered. Better to turn up at Iona when told to do so and sign where indicated. The spirit that had helped the Clan Ranald hold its inheritance without feudal charters was not blunted; this was evidenced in the later Montrose wars and the Gaelic poetry that surrounds it, but a new era was being entered, an era of increasing external threats.

By accepting the feudal charters and the extra security they afforded the Clan Ranald was accepting a burden that would undermine its independence. In a variety of ways increased contact with the

authorities in the south led to increased debts; these debts were to have a detrimental effect on the clan's feudal superiorities. As the 17th century progressed, the Clan Ranald fell further into debt and if these financial burdens did not lead to ruin (as they did for the Clan MacLean), certainly the Clan Ranald was weakened in relation to outside forces; and so any inquiry into the Clan Ranald's superiorities must, simultaneously, be an inquiry into these rising debts because these two issues quickly became woven into one. And, it should be added, a comprehension of this long term Clan Ranald problem illuminates an issue that was equally worrying for most of the conservative west Highland chiefs.

Back in 1531 the first John Moydartach had lost all the legal titles to the Clan Ranald lands and his son, Allan MacIain, took no steps to have the charters reissued. Moreover, his son, Angus MacAllan was lax regarding such matters. They could afford to be. Indeed, for nearly three-quarters of a century the Clan Ranald had held its lands by force with no feudal right whatsoever.<sup>5</sup> The situation envisioned in far off Edinburgh bore little relationship to the reality in the Gaelic west; the repeated failures of the king's feudal lieutenants Huntly, Argyll and Atholl demonstrated this. But by the first decade of the 17th century the government was making slow but real inroads into the area and Donald MacAllan could not afford to ignore the feudal charter.

Following the Statutes of Iona, Donald MacAllan received two important charters. The first, dated on both 20th March and 4th June 1610, confirmed his rights to the thirty merklands of Skeirhow

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5. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol. II, p.310.



in South Uist, the twelve merklands of Benbecula and the pennylands of Gergryminis also in Benbecula. The second charter issued on 24th July of that same year, conferred the thirty merklands of Moidart, the thirty-seven merklands of Arisaig, the thirty merklands of Eig, the fourteen merklands of Morar, the twenty-three merklands of Kyndess and in South Uist the thirty merklands of Skeirhow and six merklands of Boisdale.<sup>6</sup>

In 1633 a discharge was signed by Colin MacKenzie of Seaforth on a commission granted by the second John Moydartach. This commission allowed MacKenzie to collect all debts and rents on Clanranald's lands "for the releifing of his burdens and debtis resting to us and utheris".<sup>7</sup> Later that year Archibald Campbell, Lord Lorne, Argyll's son and heir, was granted a wadset by Clanranald of the lands of Moidart and Arisaig on the mainland and some lands in South Uist and Benbecula in return for over £26,000 which Clanranald owed Argyll. Normally, in a wadset there was a reserved power for the debtor to recover his lands and rights upon payment of the debt<sup>8</sup> but in this contract with Campbell there was an unusual and somewhat ominous clause specifying that after the debt was repayed the Captain of Clan Ranald would continue to hold all of his lands, not held directly of the crown, of Lord Lorne only.<sup>9</sup> So grew the House of Argyll.

Why did these debts exist at this early period? In general, the answer is that increased contact with the government in the south

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6. GD201/1/4.

7. GD201/1/37.

8. George Watson, Bell's Dictionary and Digest of the Law of Scotland, 7th ed. (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, 1890), p.890.

9. GD201/5/903.

equalled new financial commitments. Highland chiefs often had to find security for their own and their people's good behaviour; moreover, they were to appear before the Privy Council and the expenses involved in this trip to the south were heavy. One instance related to the complicated succession of the MacNeills of Barra, in which the Clan Ranald was closely involved, offers an example of both an expensive trip to Edinburgh and a serious financial penalty for failure. In 1611 Donald MacAllan of Clan Ranald was ordered "to bring, present and exhibite with him Neill McNeill, sone to Neill McNeill of Barra, ... under the pane of ten thousand marks".<sup>10</sup> In that same year to help Clanranald cope with his debts, the crown granted Donald MacAllan an "Act of Supersedere", thus allowing him a three year respite from the pressures of his debtors to deal with his financial embarrassments<sup>11</sup> and in March of 1615 the "Lordis of Secreit Counsaill" gave him special "libertie to go home ... provyding" he raise money for "thankfull payment of his Majesteis mailleis, dewyteis, and taxationis".<sup>12</sup>

This increased level of dealing with Lowland authorities also caused new and significant fees to lawyers and scribes and, of course, there were related pressures. Even in this early period contact with the south tended to incline the chiefs to a more sophisticated and expensive style of living. Martin Martin reports that these increased dealings with Lowland society led many chiefs

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10. R.P.C., Vol. IX, 1610-1613, p.356.

11. Book of 1819, op.cit., Appendix XXII, p.19.

12. R.P.C., 1613-1616, op.cit., pp.320-21.

to adopt the southern mode of dress.<sup>13</sup> For example, in 1631 John Moydartach owed Alexander Dore, a tailor and burgess of Edinburgh, £100 Scots.<sup>14</sup> In this period following the Statutes of Iona there was also an increased outlay for policing the kindred's own lands. As was seen above in 1615, Donald MacAllan had to report his own brothers, Ranald of Benbecula and John of Kinlochmoidart, to the Privy Council as "disobedient" and in that same year he entered into an agreement with Donald MacAngus of Glengarry not to molest, or allow his kin and followers to molest, the Glengarry people.<sup>15</sup> This speculation was confirmed in August of 1622 when Sir Ruari Mor MacLeod wrote to James VI craving a respite for John Moydartach, his son-in-law, on the ground that John's father, Donald MacAllan, had spent great sums in reducing his kin, friends, tenants and neighbours to the king's obedience, thereby incurring large debts.<sup>16</sup> And, finally, the high cost of campaigning in the Civil War, including the Irish campaign, was a serious financial burden.<sup>17</sup>

The burdens continued and the debts increased for the Clan Ranald and many other west Highland kindreds. Early in 1669 the Records of the Privy Council state that, despite orders to the "cheiftannes of clannes" to appear once a year before the council to give bonds for the good behaviour of their dependants, many did not appear. A variety of excuses were given; some pleaded "very urgent

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13. Martin Martin, Description of the Western Islands of Scotland, (Stirling, 1634), pp.245-46.

14. GD201/1/32.

15. See above, p.51.

16. MS 2133, pp.113-15. Donald Gregory's historical notes.

17. A fuller discussion of the various reasons for 17th century debts is found in Frances J. Burton's Insular Societies in their Economic Setting: a Study of the Western and Northern Islands of Scotland in the Seventeenth Century, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Ph.D. Thesis, January 1974), pp.75-77.



affairs"; some declared that they were unable to find the necessary funds for caution; and one other telling excuse was commonly offered, that the chiefs did not dare to show themselves in Edinburgh for fear of arrest by their creditors.<sup>18</sup>

There appears to have been no respite from the debts and in 1680 Argyll made a revealing declaration. He stated that on account of Clanranald's "good services" he would not seek relief out of the 20,000 marks which the latter owed him.<sup>19</sup> Possibly, because of the debts that entangled the Clan Ranald with the House of Argyll, Archibald Campbell had been able to induce Donald MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald and veteran of the Montrose and Irish wars, into a service related to the downfall of the Clan MacLean.<sup>20</sup> When the Clan Ranald allowed itself to be compelled to aid in the destruction of its allies, the MacLeans, and to help the Clan Campbell expand, the conclusion must be that the chiefs of Clan Ranald had lost a serious degree of independence due to their poor handling of their debts.

In any case, the debts continued and not merely to Argyll. The Captain of Clan Ranald also owed considerable amounts to MacDonald of Sleat. In 1698 Sir Donald MacDonald of Sleat complained to his Edinburgh lawyer, John MacKenzie of Cramond, that despite having written to "Mudoirt" concerning his debts, he had "gott noe answer".<sup>21</sup> In July of 1699 Sir Donald informed MacKenzie that

I mett wt. Mudoirt (in Uist) before I came home and he allowed me as much of the rents of the [unspecified] woodsett, according to the present sett, as will pay the annuall rents of the 4,300 merks, wch. I accepted only for this year. 22

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18. R.P.C., Vol. 1669-72, op.cit., p.XXV.

19. GD201/5/937.

20. See above, p.159.

21. MS 1307/152/1698, Sleat papers in Delvine Collection.

22. MS 1307/160/17 July 1699.

In 1700 Clanranald's debts to Sleat stood at £64,000<sup>23</sup> and in 1701 a frustrated Sir Donald wrote to his lawyer:

I must forebear all kind of business only to tell you that Muidart and his people are the dreichest payers in the world, there is more than a Thousand merks They should have pay'd me at Martmas which I cannot trust now to gett before Whitsunday. 24

The debts continued to be a severe burden throughout the 18th century with the Captain of Clan Ranald never able to surmount the vast array of burdens and the kindred's involvement in the Jacobite rebellions increased the problem. At the close of the period, by 1758, a serious situation existed and it forced Ranald MacDonald, younger of Clan Ranald, to take firm measures.<sup>25</sup> Here, it is only necessary to mention that despite his luck in not having his estate forfeited for his part in the Rising of 1745-46, that estate, encumbered as it was with financial problems was a serious burden to him. In 1758 Ranald was forced to relate to Roderick MacLeod, his lawyer in Edinburgh, that owing to the estate's many debts, increased by the last Jacobite rebellion and by his father's singular lack of business sense, that

it will not be in my power to send you any cash ... [and] till I can convert [sic] cattle or kelp to cash, it is as impossible for me to give them any as it is to fly. 26

Obviously, the Clan Ranald debts were severe and it is equally sure that these debts forced a succession of the Chiefs of Clan Ranald to parcel out the kindred's feudal superiorities as collateral in a variety of deals to gain funds. But having made that point there

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23. GD221/bundle 66/27 May 1700.

24. MS 1307/178/25 January 1701.

25. See below, pp.490-93.

26. GD201/4/85.

arises an important question. Why would a conscientious Captain of Clan Ranald risk the important superiorities in his cash deals?

There are two basic answers to this question. To understand the first, it is necessary to realise when the practice started. The debts that concern this study started to grow in the early 17th century, a time when the Clan Ranald had little reason to fear the feudal charter. After all, the kindred had just succeeded in holding its inheritance for 65 years by force without feudal devices. By the time the real significance of the charters became obvious, they were in Argyll's hands; and Argyll knew the rules to this game. His ancestors had played by them and won by them for generations. The second reason the chiefs of Clan Ranald risked the superiorities by using them as security in financial arrangements is less complex and probably more to the point. In an area of such relative poverty, the Captain of Clan Ranald had little else to use as collateral. On a very basic level it can be noted that the west Highlands and Islands have never been a place that could easily be worked for a profit, certainly not in the 17th century when matters other than agricultural improvement occupied the Gael. It was possible in most years to keep the kindred fed, but very difficult and often impossible to get the perishable butter, cheese, hens, eggs, fish and sheep that nourished the people to market and turn them into cash.

Before leaving this examination of the causes of the 17th century debts facing the Clan Ranald, one other point needs to be made and as an underlying factor it might have a powerful influence on several of the most significant of the above discussed problems. When looking at the Records of the Privy Council it is useful to note the composition of the Privy Council. In a 1672 meeting in Edinburgh,



when Donald MacDonald and several other chiefs were jailed for their "refuseall" to pay caution, the members of the Privy Council were listed as "the Lord Duke of Hamilton, the Earles of Argyle, Linlithgow, Tueidale and Kincardin".<sup>27</sup> Argyll's inclusion is revealing. At that point he was the only Highlander on the Council and, certainly, his opinion in regard to Highland matters would have carried considerable weight. In the 17th century Argyll was usually a part of the establishment (even here in 1672 during the Restoration) and he had plenty of funds to help weave his webs that were financial traps for many of the west Highland chiefs. Moreover, Argyll's membership in the Privy Council gave him a powerful say in the formation of those very debts. Because of Scotland's manner of governing (and because of Campbell wit) the man who was the chief profiteer from the growing west Highland debts also played a significant part in their creation.

Stewart of Garth said, "To all the chief stood in several relations of landlord, leader and judge".<sup>28</sup> From the above, it is clear that the chief's position of "middleman" was equally significant. On one hand it was his task to serve the crown, the authorities in Edinburgh and perhaps a powerful feudal proprietor, while on the other hand he had to lead and preserve his kindred. Generally, this position with the power and status it conferred was not a problem, but, as will be seen below,<sup>29</sup> occasionally the role of "middleman" with the pressures coming from above such as entangling debts and feudal superiorities, and from below such as maintaining as much as

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27. R.P.C., Vol. 1669-72, op.cit., p.471.

28. Stewart, Sketches, op.cit., p.26.

29. See below, pp.493-94.

possible of his clan's independence as thus preserving valued aspects of their culture, like the ability to keep a large number of pensioners, caused these chiefs real concern. Furthermore, the weight of this entire study shows that the successive Captains of Clan Ranald were well-prepared for their role as Highland chief, but ill-prepared to cope with the irritating perplexities of debt, feudal superiorities and increasing southern pressure.

Administrative roles and the job of maintaining law and order within the clan were, for the chief, often tied together around the kindred's Baron Bailie Court.<sup>30</sup> George, the 8th Duke of Argyll, stated:

Great estates were then generally erected into baronies, that is to say, districts with a regular system of rural government in which the tenantry of various classes took part under a president who represented the proprietor and was called the Bailie. 31

The Clan Ranald's barony was called the Barony of Castle Tioram,<sup>32</sup> after the kindred's Moidart stronghold. It was largely through these courts that the chief oversaw the kindred and its territory. The court was concerned with legal matters at all levels and dealt out appropriate punishment. Proprietors were bound to keep good rule in the "lordships, tacks, steadings and baileries" and a 1590 bond of instruction to the overseers of bailie courts instructed them to

ryse togidder with oure kin, friends, tennentis, servandis and adherentis, and all that will do for us to slay or bring to justise notorious malefactors. 33

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30. Isabel Francis Grant, The Economic History of Scotland, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), p.185.

31. J. Fyffe, Diaries, op.cit., p.565.

32. GD201/1/298.

33. R.P.C., op.cit., Vol. IV, p.787.

In general, and certainly after 1747, a more common task was to deal with minor misdeeds and mete out less severe penalties, often in the form of fines.

It is, however, important to note that only a small portion of the court's time was taken up with these legal matters. Much of its business was purely administrative in nature. A great variety of issues was dealt with, such as the settlement of civil disputes between tenants; organising the communal working of joint farms; a standard of weights and measures was provided; woods were preserved; weaving of cloth was regulated; the brewing of ale was overseen; the migration of stock to the sheiling was directed; the area's game and fish were protected; regulations concerning the peat-mosses and common grazings were structured; and, in general, the Acts of Parliament and any dictates of the chief were enforced.<sup>34</sup>

From the documentation that exists concerning the Clan Ranald on this topic, it can be seen that from the first record, in 1634,<sup>35</sup> until the last mention of a bailie, in 1777,<sup>36</sup> only members of the kindred's duin-uasal class served as bailies and in almost every case they were MacDonalds; two of those, who were not, were MacMhuirichs and thus of equally lofty Clan Ranald standing.

There was at least one bailie on every major geographical section of the estate; one each for South Uist, Benbecula, Eigg, Canna, Moidart, Arisaig and Morar; and it seems likely that the court itself moved around the estate since it would have been quite difficult for many of the less substantial tenants to travel.

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34. Grant, Economic Scotland, op.cit., pp.53, 54 & 162.

35. RS 37/5/186.

36. GD201/2/50.



These courts were sometimes "holden by Clanranald" himself,<sup>37</sup> and sometimes under the auspices of the local bailie. In either case there would always have been a good number of the local daoine-uisle present. It has been suggested that the earlier clan councils became formalised as the Court of Barony<sup>38</sup> and this is an appealing concept since both institutions clearly involved some form of advice and consent between ranks, but no useful evidence concerning this question has been uncovered in this search. What is certain is that these courts exerted a sort of kindly localised and humanitarian approach to matters; the bailies and/or the other arbitrators, the local daoine-uisle, knew the individuals over whom they stood in judgement and they knew their circumstances. This personal knowledge played a significant role in moderating the course of justice.

A useful document, dated 20th March 1672, in the Register of Deeds, goes into considerable detail concerning the duties of a 17th century Clan Ranald bailie. It is exciting in several respects and one is that when Donald of Clan Ranald named Donald MacDonald and his eldest son John bailies in South Uist, he also made them tacks-men. This evidence strengthens the supposition that all Clan Ranald bailies had or were given substantial holdings, either in some form of written lease or oral agreement.

For the initial fee of 500 merks "silver dutie" and the yearly payment of 160 merks, 8 bolls of meal, 6 stones of butter and 6 stones

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37. GD201/1/227A, see pp.1 & 3. Ranald MacDonald was apparently not in attendance on 4th July, but was certainly present the following day.

38. Frank Adams, The Clans, Septs & Regiments of the Scottish Highlands, revised by Sir Thomas Innes of Learney, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc., 1970), p.108. See also William Croft Dickinson, Baron Court Book of Carnwath, 1523-1545, (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1937), pp.lix-lxix.

of cheese, plus a 200 merk entry fee for heirs, Donald and John were settled into "Barrnishochtrach within the Isle of Uist". And in the same document Donald of Clan Ranald "makes constitutes & ordains" both Donald and John, and to their heirs, the position of heritable bailie and chamberlain of South Uist. Donald MacDonald, John and their heirs were granted "full power" to

affix sett hold keep & continue Barron Courts in & upon the sd. haill Lands of Uist... as oft & so even as need requires and create elect nominate & choise all members of court necessar clerks and Dempster and to pursue all sundry persons guiltie of any crimes small or great both in person & means [goods] to the terror of others to comit the like thrafter and since sure fyne & amerciate [subject to a fine] all manner of Transgression & enormities to be comitted be any person whtever according to its own validity & quality.

Donald and John also had full powers as chamberlains to

collect Intromatt with uplift & receive the sd Donald McDonald of Moydart & his foresds their haile maills silver rents duties & others due and payable to them furth of the sds Lands & Isle of Uist.

If there were any problems concerning the rents the chamberlains were empowered

if need bees to fence & hold courts upon the said Lands and Decern & ordain the haill Tenants & Possissors of the sd Lands for paymt. making of their yearly duties.

And when enforcing the laws the bailies were entitled to certain of the belongings of the transgressor. Donald and John were instructed to

uptake uplift collect & Receive two Almers out of each pence land in Uist, an geild cow out of ilk theft that shall happen to be qualified agt. any person or persons wht ever committers throf with one sheep belonging to the sd theiff with any broken stock of corn that shall happen to belong to the sd. theiff lying in the sd corn yeard with two part of any Household Plenishing that shall to the said theiff ... Providing always that the sd. Baillie & Chamberlain be capable & dilligent

in exercising of the sd. officers & in discharging  
all manner of ordinances acts & statutes necessar to  
be done to the well & good of the Country as an  
Baillie ought to have done. 39

And, finally, Donald of "Barrnishochtrach" was to make a just account  
and "reckoning" of his "yearly haill Intromissions with the sd. Laird".

Those Clan Ranald bailies who can be identified as more than  
mere names of a list of witnesses, and certainly the well documented  
Donald MacDonald and his son John, were generally tacksmen and of the  
two who definitely were not, one was a wadsetter and the other a  
substantial tenant who held his lands by virtue of an oral agreement  
with Clanranald, thus all were daoin-uaisle. One individual, "Dugall  
MacDonald of Baronisnachdich", the heir of Donald and John MacDonald,  
served as the bailie of South uist for at least 31 years, from 1703<sup>40</sup>  
until 1734.<sup>41</sup> As far as the documentation shows, all areas of the  
kindred, with the exception of the mainland district of Morar and the  
Isle of Benbecula were always served by MacDonald bailies. In 1652  
Donald MacMhuirich in Barrow was bailie of Benbecula<sup>42</sup> and by 1670  
Lauchlan MacMhuirich held that position.<sup>43</sup> This seems to indicate  
that the MacMhuirich family was especially well established in Ben-  
becula and that it was highly regarded by the conservative MacDonalds  
of Benbecula. Certainly, as will be seen in other sections, the  
MacMhuirichs filled a great variety of other positions within the  
kindred and more especially for the Benbecula family, such as scribe,  
servitor and also notary. Evidence is uncertain as to whether Donald  
and/or Lauchlan MacMhuirich held tacks. If they did not, they

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39. RD2(Dal)/32/330.

40. GD201/3/60.

41. GD201/1/223.

42. RS37/7/159 and GD201/5/57.

43. RS38/4/51.



certainly would have held lands by oral agreement or possibly a wadset. It is possible that these MacMhuirichs held tacks, because the above mentioned entry in the "Book of Clan Ranald" shows that two members of this family served in the clan regiment in the Irish campaign and that they were ranked as daoin-uaisle with other powerful land-holding MacDonald cadets.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, a certain "Donald Gearr MacMhuirich" did hold a wadset in the area during that period and may well have been Donald the Bailie.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, most of the other bailies who can be identified were tacksmen. In 1672 in the neighbouring South Uist the bailies were Donald and his son John MacDonald,<sup>46</sup> and their eventual replacement was the above mentioned and long serving Dugall MacDonald of Baronisnachdich.<sup>47</sup> It should also be mentioned that in 1683 a Ranald MacDonald of Grogarry was listed as the bailie in South Uist. The circumstances that caused him to occupy this position for a period between Donald and his son John and their descendant Dugall are unclear. Perhaps Ranald of Grogarry served while Dugall, possibly his kinsman, was a minor. On the mainland in Moidart in 1734 another tacksmen, Allan MacDonald of Glenfinnan, served as bailie.<sup>48</sup> The only other possible non-MacDonald bailie, who has been discovered, is described as "Donald MacGilles Tennent in Ardgassarie & Morars Baillie" in 1681.<sup>49</sup> MacGilles may or may not have been a tacksmen, from this reference it is impossible to tell; he certainly was, at least, a substantial tenant, holding land by

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44. See above, p.137.

45. GD201/1/84.

46. RD2(Dal)/188.

47. GD201/1/186, 219 & 223. GD201/3/59 & 60. Forfeited Estates Papers (hereafter, FFEP) 1715/Box 140/1707 & 1713.

48. MS 1304/141.

49. RS38/6/475.

oral agreement,<sup>50</sup> as was James MacDonald, who served as bailie of Canna from at least 1728<sup>51</sup> until 1748 when his position was thus described:

For these fifteen years bygone he has possessed without a written Tack the Town and Lands of Korghoun and Sand Island of Canna. 52

And, finally, the other bailie who was not a tacksman was Alexander MacDonald of Glenalladale, a wadsetter, who, along with the above mentioned Allan of Glenfinnan, was named "jointly to be my Bailles, ffactors and managers"<sup>53</sup> by Penelope MacDonald, the dowager Lady Clanranald in 1736. It is interesting to note that the above mentioned non-MacDonald bailie, Donald MacGilles in Morar was probably, like the MacMhuirich bailies, a representative of a major family living in the area that was not related to the MacDonald leadership. Their influence with and knowledge of the local people was doubtless valuable in keeping local affairs harmonious.

Indeed, there is much evidence of accord and gentle justice in the single record of a Clan Ranald Baron Bailie Court that has survived. This proceeding took place in Arisaig at Borrodale on 4th and 5th July 1739. Several people were found guilty of certain offences and fined, such as

Angus gillile [who] acknowledged by Deposition his [son] Duncan, Fergus more mcEan vic Inish vic Coile, & Dugold Gillis & himself guilty of Theft of some Goats.

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50. It is also possible that "Donald MacGilles" was this man's patronymic and that he was actually a MacDonald. However, this is not likely as the surname MacGilles, or Gilles, was common and recognised as distinct from MacDonald in both south and north Morar as well as Knoydart.

51. MS 1304/154.

52. Forfeited Estates Papers 1745 (hereafter under "E") E744/1/p.2.

53. MS 1304/141.

And "Alaster Duff" who "killed a stage & a heynd in the Muire of Esan". But John Beaton from the "Kean of Leod" was "sick" and thus excused for his absence. "John McGillivare ... he killed a Dear" but was passed over without fine, with only the simple inscription "honest" offered as an explanation. In Borniesh "John McEachine" was excused because he was "ane honest poor Man"; and despite the fact that Duncan Gillise "acknowledge himself quietly" as being guilty of some unnamed misdeed, he was excused, apparently, because he was "a pretty little fellow".<sup>54</sup>

One further example of a Clan Ranald chief's involvement in the estate's legal matters and in the welfare of the poorer tenants occurred in 1760 when Ranald MacDonald, elder of Clan Ranald, wrote the following to his son, who had largely taken over the management of the estate. The problem concerned a certain Donald MacAlpine who had been accused of cutting timber without permission.

This goeth by the Bearer Donald McAlpyne: who  
notwith standing, of whate has been laid to his  
charge By Mr. Smith has shown me, in Black &  
white sufficently attested, that he is quite  
free from imputation of Information.

You may Depend I would not enter into the  
Relise of such matters unless of Being  
Sufficiently convinced of the poor mans  
Innocency to which thers no Doubt. 55

The tone of the above Baron Bailie Court is quite different from that of land leases. Terms of affection such as "ane honest poor man" and "a pretty little fellow" had their origin somewhere, almost certainly with the local bailie or the tacksman of the person being judged; and clearly the person making such observations

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54. GD201/1/227A. In the 18th century "pretty" meant attractive in the sense that an able warrior, a good and trusted swordsman, is attractive to his leader.

55. GD201/4/3.



respected these people. Perhaps such fragments give a better glimpse into the real world of the lower ranking members of the Clan Ranald in 1739 than land rentals.

A basic function of the chief was that of leader and, in the context of the traditional Gaelic world, this often meant war leader. A Highland kindred was structured for war and the chief stood at the apex of this structure. For most of the period between the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles and the last Jacobite rebellion there was little administration of justice in the Highlands outside the clan itself. True, there was a series of complex relationships between various kindreds that gave an order of sorts. Some clans were related by blood such as the several members of Clan Donald. There were kindreds allied by ancient ties of marriage and circumstance like the Stewarts of Appin and the MacLarens. A few kindreds were united against a certain enemy like the MacDonnells of Keppoch and the Clan Cameron, both of whom held part of their land by force against MacIntosh, the Chief of Clan Chattan. Certain people, who lived in close proximity and shared similar situations for generations, commonly acted in concert, such as the Robertsons and Stewarts of Atholl. And, of course, there were religious and political factions such as the episcopalian and catholic clans that combined to form the conservative west Highland block around whom much of this study is formed. But these relationships were loose and unstructured and in any case they often only tended to create larger factions for extended feuds. Until 1746, both within and without this group of kindreds, there was much friction. In the Linn nan Creach, "Age of Forays", roughly from 1545 until 1644, and even later, until 1746, when British jurisdiction finally entered the Highlands, the lack of an able and

cunning warrior chief could be catastrophic.

An incident that occurred in 1743 provides an excellent example of Highland "justice" in operation and the chief's role in it. It is described in a letter dated July 1743 from Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, to Donald Cameron, the "Gentle Locheil". Some of Locheil's followers on Loch Arkaig had been active in cattle theft and the murder of a certain "McEvan oig" was alluded to. During a meeting on the Island of Skye between Lovat, Norman MacLeod of Dunvegan and Sir Alexander MacDonald of Sleat, the subject of the Loch Arkaig reiving came up and Sleat flew into a rage. Lovat informed Locheil that MacDonald

swore a great oath that if your [Locheil's] people would touch any of his men or take their cattle from them in their way South, that he would convene every man and boy in arms that he was able to raise, and go with them himself to the heart of Locharkegg. 56

This was not subtle and it certainly was not staying within the letter of theoretical law, but in the Highlands of that period such measures were sometimes necessary; and, it seems, on this occasion Sleat prevailed.

For a kindred such as the Clan Ranald that lived in the heart of the west Highlands, an area that saw the worst of the Linn nan Creach and bore the brunt of the pro-Stewart warfare thereafter, an able war leader was essential. The Clan Ranald was blessed with a succession of such capable headmen. A story has come down of a late 15th century Clan Ranald chief that illustrates both the cunning and the martial spirit that were required to make up a successful west Highland war-lord. Allan MacRuairi MacDonald, the Chief of Clan

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56. NRA, op.cit., Survey 26, p.17.

Ranald, was journeying from his mainland districts to South Uist across the Minch in his galley when Hector MacLean of Duart happened to appear with his ten galley fleet. The Clan Ranald was at feud with the MacLeans at the time and both flight and resistance seemed pointless, so the quick-witted Allan MacRuairi had his men stretch him out on a bier and make a show of mourning. The MacLeans were told that Allan's remains were being transported to Iona for burial and, delighted at the demise of their enemy, they let the Clan Ranald galley continue unmolested. When the MacLeans were out of sight Allan ordered a change of course. Instead of continuing his journey to South Uist, the very lively Allan used his new-found knowledge that most of the MacLeans were away from home and carried out a successful raid on Mull.<sup>57</sup>

In the better documented period the Clan Ranald continued to have capable chiefs and several of them compiled exceptional records both as leaders of their kindred in war and, on several occasions, as commanders of a group of conservative west Highland clans. The first John Moydartach was the victor of the battle of Blar na Leine and the campaign that surrounded it; he was successful in defending his kindred's inheritance; and not only did he lead four other kindreds in the Blar na Leine episode, he was, with Hector MacLean of Duart, one of Donald Dubh's two commanders in the 1545 rising that was the last attempt to restore the Lordship of the Isles. John's descendants were equally successful in defending the kindred's lands without feudal charter. Donald MacAllan MacDonald, the man who

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57. Book of 1819, op.cit., p.83.



finally recovered the kindred's feudal rights, had a mixed career in military matters. He was captured, with most of his kindred, in 1595 by Sir Lauchlan MacLean of Duart while en route to aid Hugh O'Donnell, Earl of Tyrconnel, in his anti-English rebellion in Ulster and Donald MacAllan, along with almost every other west Highland chief, accepted the Statutes of Iona, but later this Captain of Clan Ranald seems to have been successful in reducing his own kindred and family to the king's obedience and given his family, that was not a simple task. His son, the second John Moydartach, was certainly highly respected. He offered to lead a catholic crusade and later demonstrated this was no idle boast by leading the west Highland contingent to Montrose's army, putting the famous ultimatum to Montrose concerning the choice of Argyll as the royal army's next and the west Highlanders' first target and he led, along with Montrose and Alasdair MacColla, one of the three royalist columns in the spoiling of Argyllshire. His son, Donald, subsequently led the kindred in the closing actions of that period, leading the men of Clan Ranald in the victory at Kilsyth and, later, in the capture of the Isle of Islay and through the following Irish campaign. His two sons, Allan and Ranald, were both experienced soldiers, having led their kindred in typical west Highland warfare and also having considerable experience in the period's conventional warfare while serving in the French army. Allan had been selected by the other chiefs to be the west Highland's prime agent with the Jacobite Court at St. Germain and to lead an earlier proposed, and abandoned, attack on Fort William and later he commanded the Jacobite descent into Argyllshire in 1715. On Allan's death the command of this west Highland force fell to his brother Ranald MacDonald, Captain

of Clan Ranald. And in 1745, Ranald, younger of Clan Ranald, was the first chief to declare for Prince Charles, and while historians have rightly given the pivotal role in the evolution of the rising to Lochail, Ranald's and the Clan Ranald's, earlier adherence was significant.

On several occasions the Captain of Clan Ranald was clearly the leader of the conservative west Highland block of kindreds. But this position of leadership does not appear to have been because of some position inherent in the Clan Ranald in relation to other area kindreds; rather, it seems to have come naturally due to the impressive nature and qualities of these several Captains of the Clan Ranald, the situations in which they found themselves and, more importantly perhaps, their positions as chiefs of a major branch of Clan Donald. Never did Glencoe or Keppoch lead such a faction. Despite Lochail's large following, the Chief of Clan Cameron was never truly the leader of such a collection of kindreds, although the considerable influence of Sir Ewen in the later 17th century and Donald "the Gentle Lochail" in 1745-46 is certain. And the small non-MacDonald kindreds such as the Stewarts of Appin could never have provided a leader for the group. But before their fall, the MacDonalds of Islay held much influence. In the opening days of the Montrose episode, Antrim's man, Alasdair MacColla, first sought out Sir Donald MacDonald of Sleat to offer him the command. It was only later, after it was learned that Sir Donald had died, after his son, Sir James, had refused the command and after other developments that John Moydartach emerged in the role of leader and spokesman for the west Highland faction. And, finally, during the Glencairn rising, Angus MacDonnell of Glengarry was the closest thing to a

west Highland leader. So, clearly, while the various Captains of Clan Ranald often held positions of leadership, it was not their right, rather it came as a result of the circumstances and because of the qualities of these men. John Moydartach of the Blar na Leine era was doubtless a great warrior and respected leader, over and above his contemporaries. The second John Moydartach, on the death of Sir Donald MacDonald of Sleat, was the most experienced and respected leader within this faction. Because of his early involvement at Killiecrankie, his considerable experience in the French army and his close personal contacts at the Jacobite court of St. Germain, Allan of the 1715 was the obvious choice to be the leader of the west Highland block throughout that period. On Allan's death his brother Ranald, who held all of Allan's qualifications, was his natural successor. Four Captains of Clan Ranald had gone far beyond simply leading their own kindred in war and had commanded large collections of west Highland kindreds in various conservative causes. Surely, this documented information puts to rest the notion that Highland kindreds were somehow unable to unite and follow one of their own chiefs in war.

However, in a Highland clan "leader" did not simply mean "war leader". A Gaelic chieftain was also looked upon as the prime representative of the race that was, at least theoretically, the clan; and he was adviser, protector and influential friend. The Gaelic word clann literally means "children", but in different contexts it could have three basic meanings. In the case of the Clan Ranald branch of Clan Donald it could mean the actual descendants of Donald, grandson of Somerled of the Isles and Argyll. In a wider context it could mean anyone who came to consider themselves MacDonalds.



Finally, it could include everyone who would follow the Captain of Clan Ranald be they MacMhuirichs, Beatons, MacLellans, Bowies or a number of others. It should be noted that these folk of non-MacDonald stock who followed the ceann cinnidh, or "head of the kindred", were important and recognised members of the institution that was the Clan Ranald.

Within the kindred the belief in common ancestry, be it actual or theoretical, was important and tended to tie the various ranks in the clan together. A Highland kindred was very much a hierarchical institution, but these ties of kinship gave it a very different outlook, a closer set of relationships between ranks, than was often found in a purely feudal situation. In the rest of Scotland kinship was also, on its own terms, quite significant but one notable difference was that in a Highland clan, unlike a feudal lordship, those who were not related to the headman's line could and often did have a significant position in their society. Examples in the Highlands are many, such as, the MacColls and Livingstones in the Stewart of Appin kindred and the MacAskills in the MacLeod kindred. In the Clan Ranald there was a variety of these groups such as the MacMhuirichs, Beatons and MacIntyres who often held special offices in the kindred; and the Bowies and MacLellans in South Uist, the Gillies in Morar and the Jamiesons and MacArthurs in Canna who were examples of smaller kindreds closely tied to a certain Clan Ranald district. And there were many other names spread over the clan's territories that are typical and expected on any list of west Highland names. And yet they all followed the Captain of Clan Ranald and were significant members of the kindred.

All these individuals and their kinsmen, as members of the

Clan Ranald, shared in the special relationship between the chief and his followers that was such a distinctive aspect of traditional Gaelic culture. While envy and jealousy have, doubtless, always been a part of the human make-up, also in Highland society there was a place for pride in the kindred, and as the kindred's prime representative, pride in the chief. If the chief was an impressive individual, if he was handsome, well-dressed, a noted warrior, married to a lovely lady and if he lived in a hospitable manner in an impressive castle or other dwelling, it was seen to reflect well on his followers, all being members of his "race".<sup>58</sup> It should be pointed out that these feelings of pride were born not simply in archaic "clannish" sentiment but in the harsh reality of the west Highland world where the lack of a capable leader in whom the people could take pride could render a clan's prosperity and even survival uncertain.

This special relationship between the chief and his followers of all levels is well documented. Chiefs often had the "meanest" sort of tenant at their table and in many cases by a happy quirk it was the shocked and disbelieving English guest who was the one to record these "unseemly" familiarities and thus preserve proof of their existence for future generations. Equally disagreeable to a variety of those raised in polite English society was the chief's habit of shaking hands with all his tenants whenever he met them. General George Wade's 1724 report to the king makes this point. Wade said that to encourage "their Fidelity" the common Highlanders

are treated by their chiefs with great Familiarity,  
they partake with them in their Diversions and  
shake them by the Hand wherever they meet. 59

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58. Edward Burt, Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland, Vol.II, (London: Rest, Fenner, Paternoster Row, 1818), pp.1-3, and Stewart, op.cit., Vol.I, p.58.

59. RH2/5/12, Mitchell Papers.

Both Edward Burt and the Anglo-Scot James Boswell also noted with dismay the chief's custom of shaking hands with his followers.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, another English visitor to the Highlands in 1700 made a comment that tells as much about himself and his society as it does of a poor Highlander's pride in his own race, a pride he felt he shared with his chief:

The poorest and most despicable Creature of the name of MacDonald looks upon himself as a Gentleman of far Superior Quality than a man in England of £1000 a year. 61

Within the Clan Ranald there is ample evidence of the special relationship between chief and his followers. It seems fitting to open this section with a document that throws light on a little known Captain of Clan Ranald, and that does his memory honour. When Allan MacDonald fell on the field of Sheriffmuir, his place was taken by his brother Ranald who earlier had also been exiled in France and seen service in the French army. Unfortunately, the fate of this new Captain of Clan Ranald, after the Jacobite collapse in 1715, was again exile in France. In 1719 he wrote from there to commend the guardian of one of his followers' sons. This little known Clanranald clearly took an interest in the child's welfare as the letter, dated 5th September, and addressed to John Stewart of Kevichan (in Atholl), shows:

I am induced to give you the trouble of this line upon the account of a pupill of yours in whom I pretend ane interest, as being the son of one come off my ffamily (I mean the deceas'd John McDonald, whom lived and dyed in the Duke of Atholes contry and servize) by the character

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60. Burt, op.cit., p.109, and James Boswell, Journal of a Tour in the Hebrides, (London: R.W. Chapman, 1936), pp.258 & 287.

61. Andrew Lang, ed., The Highlands of Scotland in 1700, (London: 1900), p.49.



the world gives of you, I am persuaded of the good choice the sd John has made in constituting you the protector and guardian of his child and as the humanity with which I am Told you treated him since his fathers death merits applause, so I think myself obliged to Thank you for it in a particular manner.

If my condition were more settled I am fully resolved to take care of that boy, and even in this situation I am under at present, was he capable to serve me I would take him in my care, but his youth and nonage makes him incapable to follow in my fortune, as I am now stated. There for I believe it will be more adviceable that he continue for sometime under your protection till it please god to give my affairs a better Turn, by altering the present circumstances. [He discusses the child's education and closes]... I shall always reckon what favour you'll show him a debt of friendship upon myself, and will be ready on all occasions to endeavor to Requite it. 62

There is also evidence that before his death Ranald's brother, Allan, had also been active in the role of influential friend and, in this case, adviser for a Margaret MacDonald. His abilities in that undertaking are made obvious by Margaret when, in 1701, she wrote to Allan of Clan Ranald:

I cannot but signify how greatly I acknowledge my self obliged to your honor in regard of your diligence and assiduity in my Little affairs though it is but what I expected of you; moreover I am fully convinced if your honor had not taken my part I had never got any thing... I return your hon'r innumerable thanks for the visible testimonys you give me, to expect the continuation of your favour and diligence, in seeing me in my own, not only in this particular, but in all other my concerns.

She closed mentioning another unspecified problem and displayed her continuing trust in Allan and his judgement by saying, "I leave the whole management of it in your hands".<sup>63</sup>

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62. GD1/53/75.

63. GD201/4/32.

A later Clanranald, Ranald, the younger of the 1745 episode, used his position and influence to protect his tenants. This specific instance is highly interesting because it displays Ranald's regard for his tenants' needs but, even more so, it is exciting because Ranald, beyond any doubt a protestant Clan Ranald chief, used his position and influence to protect his catholic tenants from the excesses of an extremist presbyterian minister. Here, in 1767, Clanranald instructs his Edinburgh business manager, William MacDonald, not to respond favourably to any request of the minister's.

I have lately in my correspondence differed a little with my friend, Mr. [John] McAulay as he made a violent attack upon me about the [catholic] missionary in Arisaig's wanting a house & the Papists enjoying such freedom - This is no matter of airs, only to do what is decent and proper - I told him I never took upon me to do anything without your orders for which he might apply - In short tho he is friendly his expressions are rather too strong for me. 64

A variety of other situations have been uncovered where the Chief of Clan Ranald acted as a protector for his tenants and two of these concern the only woman, other than Amy MacRuairi, the 14th century heiress of Clan Ruairi, who ever attained a position of leadership within the kindred. After the battlefield death of the widely respected Allan MacDonald in 1715, his widow, Penelope, Lady Clanranald, assumed a position of real importance in the clan. She was not chief; indeed, in traditional Gaelic society no woman could serve as chief since the kindred needed a warrior who could lead the clan in battle. However, Penelope was a woman of intelligence and influence and using both she performed great services to the people of

the Clan Ranald.<sup>65</sup>

In October 1722 she wrote to her kinsman and legal adviser in Edinburgh, Alexander MacKenzie of Delvine, concerning William MacLeod of Hamara, who held a wadset in South Uist. As will be seen below, this contract with MacLeod was purely a financial agreement and MacLeod was never seen as a true Clan Ranald landholder. His attempts to increase the rents on his South Uist holdings were resented by Lady Clanranald, who told Delvine:

He made them pay 8 marks the boll of meale  
and 4 marks the stone of butter and 2 marks  
the stone of cheese - 2 marks the sheep -  
Tho I make but six marks for the boll of  
meale 3 marks for the stone butter for the  
poor people would a ben ruined if they had  
payd more... I hope we have done with him  
for nowever for I never saw a man soe creull  
to the poor people or any body he could be  
master of

and she continues, saying,

The government must know sending partys with  
such people dos more harme than good to the  
government, if they had mind to have people  
quite and good subicts they should not Inrage  
and opress as all this poor country is oppressed.

"If they had payd more" and "sending partys with such people", it was never made clear whether the poor people paid any or all of what MacLeod demanded. What is clear is that MacLeod brought troops with him and that, with Penelope's guidance, the people of South Uist made their visit extremely uncomfortable and somewhat worrying:

I never saw so presumeing a man if he has noe  
wright to what he dos he is the most Impedent  
man as can be - ... I believe Hamir will not  
be so ready to come here without a party for  
[even with a contingent of "the King's Horses

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65. For a discussion of the various reasons for Penelope's influence both in South Uist and Edinburgh, see below, p.368.



with him"] they Tell he and his officer and pursyer did not sleep all that after their adventure.

Sadly, this "adventure" is not explained, but earlier in the letter Penelope MacDonald did make her part in this rough treatment of MacLeod clear. She also mentions two earlier visits to South Uist by MacLeod and his people in attempts to recover a cargo of wine that seems to have belonged to MacLeod and gone amiss and she mentions another (again undetailed) "adventer".

I give [sic "gave" "in my last" - saidly this earlier letter is not in the Delvine Collection, perhaps her kinsman and legal adviser felt it best to destroy her account of her "adventer" with MacLeod] you acompt of my friend Hamir and the little adventer we had with him about the cargo of the wine. He sent here 3 boats since to take at the remover of the cargo but since he did not send a party of red cotts I would not lett a deale goe with his boats - for I am resolved to be as cross as any at the McLeods in all my life times.

And Penelope seems to take pride in this "restrained" conduct since "you[MacKenzie] desiring me to be civile to them".<sup>66</sup>

Lady Clanranald clearly had a grudge against the MacLeods, possibly growing out of their pro-government stance in the Rebellion of 1715 in which her husband had been killed, but this anti-MacLeod spleen does not account for or diminish the reality of her attachment to the poorer tenants. In other cases she is seen taking their part with equal vigour and these issues involved no MacLeods. The following case was even an internal Clan Ranald problem that involved Donald MacDonald, the old Tutor of Benbecula, who had in 1725 succeeded to the position of Captain of Clan Ranald. In this period Donald faced huge debts, partly old ones and partly ones growing out of the

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66. MS 1303/27, Hamara, in Glendale, Isle of Skye.

complicated struggle to regain the Clan Ranald estate after its forfeiture following the 1715 rising. It also seems reasonable to point out that Donald of Benbecula may not have been at his best; he died only a month or so later.

In this case Penelope is displeased with Donald because he contemplated moving people off certain sections of the estate to create larger districts for cattle-grazing in an effort to come to grips with his debts. In this letter Lady Clanranald displays her considerable intelligence in a scheme that, with MacKenzie's aid, was intended to frustrate Benbecula's removal plans and thus, again, protect the tenants. She starts by saying that Benbecula

had given out to all the people that he was in power to give tacks and to remove the tenants as he pleased. When I heard this, I told him I thought he could not set the lands nor give tacks without your consent or myne [because of the kindred's debts to Delvine arising from the recovery of the forfeited estate]... and now he press me to give him lands in Canna and Arracik for to put Cowes upon and remove the poor people when I have now noe lands to give them which I think very hard.

And so she formulates a plan to escape the situation with Benbecula.

In it she enlists her kinsman's aid and asks him to seem to tie her hands and thus prevent her doing what Benbecula desired.

So I must begg as I am in your debt a considerable soum of money that you will write a very pressing letter to me for your money... and that you have sent Bellfinlay [Angus MacDonald, Clanranald's chamberlain] a ffactory to upe lift the rents and the Enter money that the people is to pay for their Tacks and you has this as being perchaser and I owing you money which you must see payd and that he shall not set lands or remove any of the Tennants without your order or advice and that this you may put in the factory you give Bellfinlay. This factory being sent to Bellfinlay upon the receipt of this.

Penelope MacDonald felt this would create the impression that

Mackenzie of Delvine "will hender me from giving any promises without your[Mackenzie's] concent",<sup>67</sup> when, in fact, she was directing Delvine not "to allow" her to remove the tenants. Donald of Clan Ranald died sometime in the following month and nothing more is heard of the removal plans.

Due to the debts that burdened the kindred several chiefs were forced to deal with outsiders and allow these individuals to oversee sections of the estate, but in these cases special care was taken to ensure the Clan Ranald tenants were protected from the excesses of the outsiders. In a 1699 wadset of some of the lands on the Island of Eigg, John MacLeod of Talisker was bound by Allan MacDonald not

to uplift or displace one or any of the tennants  
they duly paying their Rents & giveing obedience  
as becometh tennants. 68

Later, in 1764, Ranald MacDonald, younger of Clan Ranald, took George Sime of Stuckgown to law because he had exceeded the terms of his contract "to cutt and manufacture" oak and rowan trees in Moidart and Arisaig<sup>69</sup> and damaged the tenants' possessions. By this period the wording of the contract between Clanranald and the outsider had become quite specific in the protection of tenants.

Agreed and condescended on by both parties  
that incase any damage was done to the corn,  
corn Lands, medows or grass in Leading the  
timber ... to the shore ... the saids  
Messrs. John Godsman & George Sime obliged  
them to indemnify the Tenants for any such  
Damage as the same should be valued &  
ascertained by comprysers chosen by them  
and the Tennants.

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67. MS 1303/129, 28th October 1730.

68. GD201/5/9, Talisker, Isle of Skye.

69. GD201/5/104.



Clanranald and his tenants won the judgement.<sup>70</sup>

Chiefs were also expected to help the daoin-uaisle see to the welfare of those unfortunate members of the kindred who from circumstance, infirmity or age could not do so themselves. For example, Ranald, elder of Clan Ranald, wrote the following to his son in an undated missive of the 1750 period.

Loving child, please at your Conveniency to allow to the poor wydow Bearer hear of & her orphans one Bole of the Mouller of your mill of Benbecula, which shall be sustained at accounting with Clanranald senior. 71

They also took special care of those who gave them good service in war. A good example occurs in the minutes of the Trustees of the Estate of Clan Ranald, on 20th December 1806. It is interesting to note that the two men who are here discussed were followers of Ranald MacDonald, younger of the Clan Ranald, in the rising in 1745-46, and despite the fact that he and his son John had died, that the two old men here discussed continued to be financial burdens to the estate,<sup>72</sup> that the estate was encumbered with great debts and under the Trustees of the next Clanranald, the young Reginald George, the Clan Ranald family still insisted the two loyal old men be maintained.

The Factor then stated that old Samuel McDonald at Gearmish and Ewen McDonald at Kilioavan formerly both Tacksmen of respectability on the Estate and nearly connected with the Family, the former had attended Clanranald to fforce & been his confidential friend in the troubles of the 45 & suffered a long imprisonment in Edin. Castle on that account but now in poor and indigent circumstances had in the course of the management of the preceeding factors fallen into

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70. GD201/5/123.

71. GD201/1/349/63.

72. GD201/5/1233/4/p.5 (16 March 1778) and GD201/5/1233/38/p.24 (11 December 1801).

arrear and increased that arrear since the time they came under the Factors [Robert Brown] charge, the former now owing £42.10 & the latter £25.16 - that they had now nothing to subsist upon except the small holding of Lands gratis from the proprietor and that even the strictest execution of the law could not enforce payment of what is owed, the meeting on considering these circumstances direct the Factors to discharge their arrears & take credit for them next account. 73

The traditional Captains of Clan Ranald were much more than tyrants lording over a servile people. Indeed, with the exception of Dugall MacRanald, whom the clan deposed, the chiefs of this kindred closely and admirably conformed to Bishop Leslie's early description of Gaelic chiefs. Leslie said that the custom of the Highland people

has been at all times to acknowledge one principal for their chief captain to whom they are obedient in time of war and peace, for he is mediator between them and the Prince. He defends them against the invasions of their enemies, their neighbours, and he causes justice to be ministered to them all in the manner of the country. 74

And it seems fitting to close this enquiry of the traditional Clan Ranald chiefs with an old Gaelic saying:

Co ris a theid mi a ghearan's  
gun Mac Mhic Ailein am Muideart?  
 To whom can I go with my complaint  
 when there is no Clanranald in Moidart? 75

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73. GD201/5/1233/43/p.45.

74. Bishop J. Leslie, History of Scotland from the Death of King James I in the Year 1436 to the Year 1561, (London: English Text Society), p.210.

75. GD50/223 (October 1926).

## CHAPTER IV

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Between the chief and the commoners of the clan were the daoín-uaisle. These were the nobles of the kindred, Gaeldom's warrior aristocracy. They performed a variety of functions and filled important positions in the kindred; to understand the daoín-uaisle is to grasp one of the most basic elements in the structure of old Highland society.

Through these individuals many vital functions were carried out. Their duties were many, as were their advantages. Occupying a middle position of sorts, these highborn Gaels were the connecting link between the chief and the remainder of the clan. The many functions of the Captain of Clan Ranald and those of his more powerful daoín-uaisle could draw them into other spheres, away from the mass of the kindred. But during the 17th and 18th centuries there were always other daoín-uaisle on the land whose basic functions bound them together with the kindred's common folk in a close relationship.

By the early 17th century the daoín-uaisle had evolved into a variety of land holding positions spread over the kindred's territories but it is important to note that this situation seems to have evolved only in the late 16th or early 17th centuries. Earlier, it appears that some of these daoín-uaisle, perhaps most of them, did not rent land and reside on it, but were kept as retainers in the chief's residence. An anonymous description of the western Isles, ascribed to the 1577-1595 period, states that in Islay,

Ilk merk land man sustein daylie and yeirlie ane  
gentleman in meit and claith quhilk dois na  
labour, but is haldin as ane of their maisters  
household men, and man be sustenit and furneisit  
in all necessaries be the tennent, and he man be,



reddie to his maisters service and advis. 1

Presumably, however, there were a few locally based daoín-uaisle spread over the clan's lands to oversee the commoners even in this early period.<sup>2</sup> The Clan Ranald, with its geographically spread territories, appears to have kept its gentlemen at least somewhat divided as the presence of Castle Tioram off the coast in Moidart and Castle Borve in western Benbecula indicates. These mainland and Outer Hebridean strongholds would surely have been manned with a warden and some retainers drawn from the daoín-uaisle class when the chief was not in residence. Moreover, because one of the victims of the 1577 MacLeod descent on Eigg is said to have been Angus MacIain, one of John Moydartach's sons,<sup>3</sup> it appears that a Clan Ranald duin-uasal of powerful lineage may have been settled into the kindred's various islands and mainland districts in this period. Given the violence and uncertainty of the late 16th century's Linn nan Creach this would have been reasonable.

In the early 17th century the authorities in Edinburgh moved to reduce the number of "gentlemen servandis" kept by the chiefs. The 1609 Statutes of Iona specified that "na man" among those west Highland and Hebridean leaders who signed the document would

be chairgeable to the cuntrey be halding in  
houshold of ma gentilmen nor his proper rent  
may sustene. 4

It was therefore agreed that each of the chiefs would be limited to a "particular number of gentilmen in houshold". Donald MacAllan, Captain

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1. G. Gregory Smith, ed., The Book of Islay, (Edinburgh, 1895), p.478.
  2. Frances J. Shaw, The Northern and Western Islands of Scotland, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1980), p.49.
  3. MacDonalds, op.cit., Vol.2, p.294.
  4. Donaldson, ed. Scottish Documents, op.cit., p.173.

of Clan Ranald, was given permission to keep six. In 1616 the Privy Council passed further regulations on this topic, again limiting Clanranald to six household retainers.<sup>5</sup> This, plus another 1616 directive which ordered chiefs to rent their lands at a "constant and cleir dewytie",<sup>6</sup> encouraged the granting of leases as an alternative manner of supporting the clan's daoine-uisle.<sup>7</sup> In this way the powers in Edinburgh were appeased and the kindred was able to keep a high number of gentleman warriors, thus maintaining its military potential.

The Clan Ranald's land was parcelled out to its daoine-uisle in a variety of ways, the most common being the "tack" or lease. In 1625 and 1626 the second John Moydartach issued a series of six tacks to various followers: "Ronald mc Ronald of Castellborff"; "Johne Mc Allan vc ean of Kenlochmoydart"; "Rorie mc Allan mc ean of Annit"; "Alexr mc ean oig of Glenalladill"; "Donald gorme mc angus mc allan of Borrodaill & Arnapole";<sup>8</sup> and "Johne Ronaldsoun, parson of Ellanfinan".<sup>9</sup> There is useful information in these leases but evidence in them shows that the young John Moydartach issued these tacks not as a first division of land among his daoine-uisle, but in an effort to gain financial aid from these individuals, his more substantial kinsmen, who already held the various tracts of land.

These tacks went out to help John Moydartach (or "Johne Mc Ronald", as he appears in these documents) regain

the great sums of money paid be the above Johne

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5. R.P.C., op.cit., first series X, pp.774-6.

6. Ibid., p.775, and Vol. XI, p.192.

7. Shaw, op.cit., p.49.

8. RS37/3/pp.126-7, 129-31 & 277-8.

9. GD201/2/1.

McRonald of Moydart, Captain of Claneronald,  
to Sr Donald McKy of Strathnaver in obtaining  
the heretable right of the lands of Moydart  
and Arrassack. 10

For example, John Ronaldson, parson of Ellanfinan was to pay 281 $\frac{1}{2}$   
merks yearly for four years, amounting to 1,124 merks, as  
"grassum".<sup>11</sup> After this initial four year period, during which  
Sir Donald MacKay's debt was to be paid, John Ronaldson's rent was  
to be forty merks.<sup>12</sup>

A look at the witnesses on these tacks shows not only the  
expected presence of Sir Donald MacKay of Strathnaver, but also a  
variety of Clan Ranald gentlemen other than those who received tacks,  
many of whom were also clearly settled in specific clan areas.  
Among those appearing were "dodo McMurchie" and "Angus mc eachen"  
who were not listed as specifically tied to a parcel of land;  
however, the following daoin-uaisle were: "Johne mc ean vc ean doy  
in ardnaforand", "Allane mc ean mc phersone in Dallilea", "Murdo  
mc connell doy in glenalladill", "Johne mc allister mc ean oig in  
Glenalladill", "Roirie Mc Allane in Glenalladill"; and "Angus mc Inns  
vc couill in Annat".<sup>13</sup> By this period the majority of the Clan  
Ranald daoin-uaisle appear to have been spread over the kindred's  
territory and were no longer serving as retainers in the chief's  
household.

Probably because of the predominantly financial nature of  
these early leases, they do not give a great deal of information  
concerning the requirements, other than monetary, being made of the

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10. Ibid.

11. Sum paid on entry to or renewal of a tack.

12. GD201/2/1.

13. RS37/3, pp.126-7, 129-31 & 277-8.



tacksmen. The Captain of Clan Ranald only saw fit to require the following of his various daoine-uaisle:

In case it sall happin the said [tacksman or his heirs] or other of thame to comit any deid or cryme civill or criminal ... against onie persone or personis quhomsumever quhairby I [Clanranald] and my foirsaidis as thair superiors of the lands and otheris underwritten be challengeit & maid answerable for In that caice thay and other of thame salbe obleist ... to warrand & skaithless keep me & my foirsaidis from the samen wrangis deidis and crymes and of all inconvenientis costis damages & expensses that may follow thairupon at the handes of all personis quhom it affects.

In return Clanranald, himself, made the following pledge:

Be the terms hereof bind & obleiss me [Clanranald] & my aires maill ... to warrand and defend this present letter of tack & assidation of the particullar lands abovewritten during the space & tyme abovewritten In all & be all crymes as is above specified from all evictions, deid & danger & inconvenient quhatsomever to the [tacksman and his heirs] aganes all mortalls. 14

This second clause is interesting. If the tacksman fulfilled his part of the bargain and "skaithless" kept John Moydartach then he could expect his chief's support against all danger "quhatsomever [and] ... aganes all mortalls". It is hard to imagine more specific documentary evidence of the importance of security, clan loyalty and interdependence between the ranks of Highland society.

It has been noted that in the southern Hebrides short termed tacks were common because many of the islands were owned by the Campbells of Argyll and Glenorchy and thus were on a more commercial footing, whereas the longer tacks that were common in the northern Hebrides reflected a society where "security and clan loyalties were still felt to matter more than increasing the monetary yield of the

property.<sup>15</sup> This conclusion is supported by these early Clan Ranald tacks. Even though they were primarily of a financial nature, the security of the chief and tacksman was specified and the financial object was to be dealt with in four years; thereafter, the duin-uasal and his heirs were to enjoy the leases at a vastly reduced rate for two lifetimes and nineteen years.<sup>16</sup>

This long security of tenure that the Captain of Clan Ranald was prepared to offer loyal daoin-uaisle was underscored forty-seven years later in 1673 when John Moydartach's son, Donald of Clan Ranald, extended the duration of the tack that had gone to "Johne Mc Allane vic ean of Kenlochmoydart" by giving his son a new lease. In this new tack Donald of Clan Ranald "Being will maist willing to enter and receave the said Alexr Mcean vic Allane kyndlie tennent" set the lands, again for "two lyferents and nyntain years thrafter" and to this new tack some land in South Uist was added.<sup>17</sup>

Another example of a long serving family of daoin-uaisle comes to light in the minutes of the Tutors of the young Reginald George of Clan Ranald in 1797. In these minutes a memorial from a Lieutenant Angus MacDonald "Tacksman of Milton" is preserved. This case is interesting not only because it documents a line of tacksmen who held their lands for generations, but also because, unlike the above Kinlochmoidart case, the Milton family were early wadsetters and later that status was changed to that of tacksmen. The Minutes record that Angus stated

he and his prediceors had possessed for a great

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15. Shaw, op.cit., p.51,

16. RS37/3, pp.126-7, 129-31 & 277-8, and GD201/2/1.

17. RD3 (Dur)/29/329.

many years the said lands first under wadset and afterwards under Leases and renewals thereof. 18

And, indeed, a look at the Judicial Rentals taken by the Forfeited Estates Commission in 1718 shows that Angus' ancestor "Ranald MacDonald of Milntown" did hold a wadset on these lands.<sup>19</sup>

Because of the serious debts facing the Clan Ranald most of its major tacksmen had evolved into wadsetters by the 18th century and so these daoin-uaisle continued to enjoy a notable security of tenure.<sup>20</sup> In this 18th century period the Captain of Clan Ranald continued to give out tacks that, for the time, still conferred notably long tenure to his less substantial land holders. For example, in 1730 Ruairi MacDonald of Askernish was continued in his holding and while this contract does not explain how he previously held the land, it does specify that Ruairi was to have the right to Askernish "for all the days, years & space ... of his lyfetye".<sup>21</sup>

Daoin-uaisle were distinguished by the name of the place they resided. In an island like South Uist there were many Donald MacDonalds, but only one Belfinlay. Tacksmen in the Clan Ranald were usually descended from the family of a current or previous chief with the line occasionally drawn through a more substantial tacksmen, feuar or wadsetter family. In 1797 Angus MacDonald, son of Angus, tacksmen of Milton in South Uist stated that his predecessors had "for a very great many years possessed the farm of Milton" and indeed Angus believed that his ancestors' entry to these lands had been "coeval with that of the family of Clanranald to the Estate"

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18. GD201/5/1233/26/p.33.

19. GD201/5/1257/5/ 96.

20. See below, pp.262-72.

21. GD201/2/10.



and, finally, he stated that he was "a distant connection of the family".<sup>22</sup> The several 17th and 18th century MacEachen tacksmen<sup>23</sup> can be traced through the head of this kin group, MacEachen of Howbeg in South Uist, to the brother of an early Clan Ranald chief. Often tacksmen families were descended from one of the kindred's more substantial wadsetter families and through them to an earlier chief. An example of this was the family of Belfinlay who were descended from James MacDonald, the eldest son of the early 17th century Ranald MacDonald of "Castellworff" or Castle Borge in Benbecula.<sup>24</sup> The Benbecula family descended from Allan, 9th Chief of Clan Ranald. So in the Clan Ranald most tacksmen were either close or distant kinsmen of a chief; in a very few instances they were of a totally different family.

As will be seen, a limited number of non-MacDonald clan professionals held tacks, but for the Clan Ranald there is no evidence of a non-related but allied kindred receiving the sort of preferential treatment as, say, the MacColls who served the Stewarts of Appin. True, there were non-MacDonald tacksmen in the Clan Ranald; in 1718, for example, Neill MacLeod held the lands of Kilbride in South Uist and Dugall MacIntosh possessed a tack for the island of Eriskay<sup>25</sup> but neither of these men, or any other non-MacDonald, was able to establish a line of tacksmen notable within the Clan Ranald. In 1748 the Judicial Rental shows fifteen substantial tacksmen on the estate: twelve were MacDonalds (or MacEachens<sup>26</sup>), one a MacLeod, one

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22. GD201/5/213.

23. Such as Hector MacEachen of Peninerine, South Uist, 1707, FFEP (1715)/Box 140 and John MacEachen of Glenuig, Moidart, 1760, GD201/2/23.

24. RS3/49/158, 16 August 1683.

25. GD201/5/1257/5/ 70 & 136.

26. MacEachens were actually MacDonalds, see below, p.329.

MacAulay, the minister and the other MacMhuirich, the bard.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, with the exception of the prestigious and highly valued MacMhuirich professional family, the Clan Ranald tacksmen were a conspicuously homologous lot.

This system of granting favourable tacks to relatives or close supporters certainly allowed some families to become hereditary and to hold their positions for many generations, but this was not always the case and, equally, it should be remembered that in every case, such as those mentioned above, where a line of tacksmen was established, only one individual was able to keep the lands and extend the succession of the line. His brothers were not so comfortably settled. The questions, "What happened to the brothers and why were other loyal tacksmen not continued in their holdings?" are important.

It would be wrong to assume that the traditional Highland system generally led to the formation and preservation of a tight and unalterable elite. On the contrary, traditional Gaelic society tended to prevent the creation of a static upper crust, not to maintain it. Land was limited and it was all occupied. Each new chief would usually have a small group of brothers and uncles who would need land. Consequently, with each new chief, the more remotely related daoin-uaisle would find themselves still another generation removed from the ruling line. These distant relatives might at any time be replaced by a needy one nearer to the current chief. This slow but constant reshuffle at the top tended to keep the upper orders of the clan in flux and allowed only a few families to become entrenched.

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27. E 744/1.

After being replaced, the ex-tacksman sank into a lower class, as did the brothers of a current tacksman. They would either take up a sub-lease as one of the major tenants on another's tack, or, perhaps relying on their military background and abilities, seek a military career abroad. In earlier periods many tacksmen, ex-tacksmen and their kin found employment in Ireland in the class of professional mercenary soldiers or "galloglass"<sup>28</sup> and later on the continent and throughout the Empire in the British army. Indeed, because of this constant reshuffle at the top of the kindred (and because of the importance of certain clan professionals, like the MacMhuirich bards and, in kindreds other than the Clan Ranald, allied non-related kin groups), it was not the relatives of a chief long dead, but either the unrelated hereditary families of bards, harpers, pipers and physicians or, in some cases, the area tacksmen who were the heads of allied but smaller and unrelated kindreds who were more likely to hold their tacks for generations. While examples of each category of the above unrelated can be found in the west Highlands, such as the MacCrimmons of Borreraig, pipers to the MacLeods of Dunvegan,<sup>29</sup> or the unrelated but allied area kindred of MacColls who served the Stewarts of Appin,<sup>30</sup> it was only the bardic family of MacMhuirich that so established itself in the Clan Ranald. These artists and tacksmen will be discussed below.

This constant replacement of distant relatives by those closer to the chief tended to keep all sections of the clan "inward-looking"

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28. Kenneth Nichols, Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Ltd., 1972), pp.87-90.

29. Grant, MacLeods, op.cit., pp.27, 91 & 376-77, and Frederick T. MacLeod, MacCrimmons of Skye: Hereditary Pipers of the MacLeods of Dunvegan, (Edinburgh, 1933).

30. E737/1/1/pp.5-6.



and loyal to the family of the chief and thus worked against fragmentation of the clan. While this lack of a completely static elite was as attractive aspect of Highland society, it must be pointed out that this continuing reshuffle of daoin-uaisle generally represented an infiltration from the top downwards. It was not common for an individual to better himself, but on occasion it could happen. Over the generations professional families could rise, accumulate land and advance their position. It was also possible for a lower level duin-uasal of exceptional martial prowess to make himself indispensable to his chief, thus improving his position and that of his offspring.

Clan Ranald tacksmen carried out a variety of functions for the kindred. One of their responsibilities was to act as the director of agricultural activities on their portion of the estate. Most tacksmen were not active farmers, the majority of their own lands was sub-let and the proportion they kept in their own hands was cultivated by means of labour dues of the sub-tenants and cottars. The tacksmen did take an interest in the breeding of cattle and even the 7th Duke of Argyll, John Campbell, admitted that "some of them acquired a taste for and knowledge of the breeding of cattle".<sup>31</sup> The tacksmen and their near kin were certainly much involved in the cattle droving trade. They would usually buy the livestock of the small tenants and include them in their droves of cattle going to the "trysts" or cattle markets. This was useful to the tenants as it was often beyond their means to transport their few animals to market.<sup>32</sup> Occasionally, professional drovers were employed to

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31. John Campbell, Scotland As It Was and As It Is, (Edinburgh: University Press, 1887), p.7.

32. Grant, Folk Ways, op.cit., pp.122-23.

transport the animals to market. In 1687 Donald MacDonald of Benbecula contracted "Ronald McAlister ... drover in Kintyre" to transport 160 "good & Sufficient mercat cowes" to the tryst in the south.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, this was a sizeable business.

Since much of the kindred's land, and thus its productive capability, was in the hands of the daoin-uaisle, who were often tacksmen, they provided an economic stability that benefitted the entire kindred. The financial support these daoin-uaisle gave to the chief will be discussed later, but here it is important to note that this stability often benefitted the sub-tenants and cottars. Using his influence, the tacksman could occasionally organise various types of employment for his tenants, such as fox hunting or forestry, to supplement their normal agricultural income.<sup>34</sup> He imported seed corn and other grain in poor years and sold it at cost price. This grain was not simply a source of seed, but during famine conditions these imported grains were absolutely necessary as food. When a surplus existed, the tacksman controlled the distribution of the grain. Where fishing was practised, the tacksman often provided the boats and nets. He also dealt in merchandise such as iron, salt, leather and other manufactured goods required by the tenants.

Under the system of "steelboll" he would loan cattle, implements, grain and work horses, along with, in some cases, a small piece of land to a favoured tenant. On occasion the tacksman himself would receive a steelboll contract from the chief as was the case in 1767 when Allan MacDonald of Belfinlay received a small farm in Arisaig, together with the "whole stocking upon the sd Lands

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33. RD4 (Mack)/63/102-4.

34. Grant, Folk Ways, op.cit., p.123.

consisting of Black Cattle and Horses, and Labouring utensils with fourty Bolls of corn".<sup>35</sup>

Another function of the tacksman was to act as rent and public dues collector on his lands.<sup>36</sup> Traditionally, a sizeable surplus existed between the amount collected from the tacksman's tenants and the amount he paid to the chief. A letter preserved in the General Assembly papers from the year 1731 states that the rent on a portion of Benbecula was set at 1,600 merks, but that the tacksman actually received 2,100 merks. The letter explains that this surplus was because

small Tennants land are sett at a Dearer rent in proportion than the rennt ... [of the] Tacksman, and such as are Dependants of the families by blood or other relation. 37

This surplus was normal and it was intentional. It was to be used by the tacksman to support himself and his family. From this surplus grew the economic stability that aided the chief when in need and that supported the small tenants during hard years.

This rent, however, was not all paid to the tacksman in cash. Money could be rare in the Highlands. The tacksman's tenants paid most of their dues in "kind". This form of rent was referred to as "casualties" and included various types of produce such as butter, cheese, poultry, eggs, grain, sheep and cattle. By accepting rent dues in kind and organising the sale of these products in distant markets, the tacksmen performed the most important function of

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35.GD201/5/1033-34 & 36.

36.Public dues such as teinds, the tenths of produce rendered by parishioners for the upkeep of the local church.

37.CH1/2/66.



of turning the Highlanders' products into cash.<sup>38</sup> Penelope MacDonald, the dowager Lady Clanranald, underlined this problem of turning rent in kind into cash when she wrote to her lawyer and kinsman, Alexander MacKenzie of Delvine in 1725. She stated that the new Clanranald, Donald MacDonald of Benbecula,

will pay you four thousand marks which is all that can be got at this time by reason all our rents is paid in cattle and meal and butter which is very hard to make money of in this country. 39

Closely related to this service of rent collecting was "ariage and carriage" which was the tacksman's responsibility of transporting these victual rents and other goods to the chief.

One "service" that was doubtless a pleasure for the tacksman was attending his chief and the other daoin-uaisle of the kindred when indulging in their favourite pastime of hunting. A clause in a 1625 Clan Ranald tack specifies that all of the kindred's tacksmen were to upkeep and

to intertinie myne [John Moydartach's] and my foirsaidis horsis hounds hawkis and thair keepers yeirlie pro rata as the remanent of my countrey peopill shall do. 40

With his sound economic footing the tacksman could assist the chief as well as the clan's commoners. In April of 1745 John MacDonald, tacksman in Canna, was able to lend 4,000 merks to Ranald, the younger of Clan Ranald,<sup>41</sup> and an account, dated 8th July 1723,

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38. Malcolm Gray, The Highland Economy 1750-1850, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957), p.17, and Eric Cregean, "The Tacksmen and their Successors: A Study of Tenurial Reorganisation in Mull, Morvern and Tiree in the Early 18th Century", Scottish Studies, Vol.13, (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1969), p.102.

39. MS 1303/25, May 1725.

40. GD201/2/1.

41. Charles Fraser-Mackintosh, Antiquarian Notes, (Inverness: A. & W. MacKenzie, 1897), p.261.

gives some indication of the full extent to which the Captains of Clan Ranald relied on their tacksmen for funds. Of the nineteen debts listed, eight were to the kindred's tacksmen or their families and the total the chief owed just to these particular daoin-uaisle was 12,500 merks.<sup>42</sup>

The tacksman's functions in the social sphere were less clearly defined, but worthy of consideration. He was the chief's representative on the lands and it was his task to keep order and enforce the chief's laws. The tacksman had a function in the kindred's Baron Bailie Court. The court's jurors were chosen from the most respected tenants of the district, the majority being tacksmen; and, doubtless, the tacksman's word carried considerable weight when one of his tenants stood before the court.<sup>43</sup>

In the traditional period professional men were drawn from the ranks of the upper orders of the kindred. The chief's family, as well as that of the duin-uasal, was a major source for scribes, notary publics and ecclesiastics.<sup>44</sup> The existing hereditary families of professional men were the other major source. On the Clan Ranald estate the two best examples were the MacMhuirichs and Beatons. Many studies of the west Highlands make much of the illiteracy in the Highlands and often note the examples when Gaels witnessed documents "with their hand led upon the pen" by the notary.<sup>45</sup> This illiteracy was

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42. GD201/5/15.

43. W.R. Kermack, The Scottish Highlands, A Short History, (Edinburgh: W. & A.K. Johnston & G.W. Bacon Ltd., 1957), pp.143-44.

44. In other Highland areas families of hereditary ecclesiastics developed as well. See John Bannerman, "MacLauchlans of Kilbride and their manuscripts", Scottish Studies, (Aberdeen: University Press, 1977), pp.1-34.

45. Andrew McKerrall, "The Tacksman and his Holdings in the South-West Highlands", Scottish Historical Review, Vol. 26, (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1947), p.12.

one of the major targets of the Statutes of Iona in 1609, which ordered substantial Highlanders to send their children to "the scuil-lis on the Lawland" so they might learn "sufficientlie to speik, reid and wryte Inglische".<sup>46</sup> But while it is true that English was not commonly known in the 17th century Highlands, there is one major problem with studies that conclude the Gaels of the duin-uasal class or the chief's class were often illiterate. It is simply not true. They may or may not have been literate in "Inglische", but that was an alien language for them. Gaelic was their language and many were literate in it.<sup>47</sup>

On the Clan Ranald estate, there were catholic schools of sorts in the late 17th and 18th centuries and some of the Clan Ranald tacksmen and their families attained a reasonably high standard of education, in some cases including study abroad. Neill MacEachen, the second son of Alexander MacEachen of Howbeg, provides a good example of an educated member of the Clan Ranald's duin-uasal class. His story has survived in detail because he was instrumental in helping Prince Charles Edward Stuart escape to South Uist in the aftermath of the collapse of the last Jacobite rising and because his grandson Marshall Alexandre MacDonald, Duke of Tarentum, achieved a certain renown on the continent in the French army while serving under Napoleon Bonaparte. Neill was born in 1719 and educated in the Hebrides by priests until he went off to the Scots College at

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46. Gordon Donaldson, ed. Scottish Historical Documents, (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1974), p.174.

47. See above, p.24 for examples from the Clan Ranald. For examples from the Clan MacLeod see John Bannerman, "Gaelic Endorsements of Early Seventeenth Century Documents", Studia Celtica, Vol.XIV/XV, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979/80), pp.18-33.



Douai. It seems that an ecclesiastical career was intended for him, but at some point, for unknown reasons, he turned away from that path. When he returned to South Uist he became parish schoolmaster and tutor to the Clanranald family. It was said that Neill proved an excellent guide for the fugitive prince because of his loyalty, his knowledge of the area, because,

he was well educated [in the European sense], and he conversed fluently in French which accomplishment was a relief to the Prince in his long and tedious concealments. 48

Other 18th century examples of the fluency of the daoine-uaisle in a variety of European languages are plentiful<sup>49</sup> and in the later 18th century General David Stewart of Garth stated that he knew of "several tacksmen of good learning, who could quote and scan the classics with much ease and rapidity".<sup>50</sup> Through the 18th century the daoine-uaisle gained a reputation for their manners and cultured behaviour as well as their education. Early in that century Defoe was favourably impressed by the Highlanders he came into contact with at court and serving in the military.

Men such as the MacKenzies, McLeans, Dundonalds [sic. MacDonalds], Gordons, McKays and others who are nam'd among the clans as if they were Barbarians, appear at court, and in our Camps and Armys, as polite, and finish'd, Gentlemen as any from other countries, or even among our own at many things, especially in arms and Gallantry, as well abroad as at home. 51

In the traditional period the cultural function of the daoine-uaisle was not clearly defined and is difficult to document. However, it is likely that here, too, they played a significant role by providing

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48. GD50/225/5.

49. Gray, op.cit., p.14.

50. Stewart, op.cit., pp.349-50.

51. Gray, op.cit., p.14.

the link between the lower and upper elements in the kindred. As the bards travelled through the Highlands and Islands, they would have been honoured guests in the homes of various daoín-uaisle. These men, by offering hospitality, were also providing a platform from which the bards could communicate with the common people.<sup>52</sup>

The daoín-uaisle received their land below its true value and were relieved of many of the day to day tasks of farming by their tenants because their basic function was not that of farmer. This surplus in rent was structured into society because a prosperous and numerous following of daoín-uaisle was of the utmost value to the chief and the entire clan. These nobles of the kindred held their parcels of the clan's territory below its true economic value because money was not of primary importance to the chief or the clan. Land was of primary importance to the clan's survival and able military men were needed to protect the land. The Clan Ranald daoín-uaisle provided the nucleus of the kindred's military strength. Their most important function was to act as the military cadre, to provide the lieutenants needed to lead the clan into battle. First and foremost, the daoín-uaisle were to be warriors and leaders of warriors.

Traditionally, then, the daoín-uaisle were members of a military class, a warrior aristocracy, and proud of their station. They were not expected simply to "turn a profit" for the chief and they were not expected to be agricultural improvers or to engage in strenuous labour on their farms. That was not their primary function.

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52. The Rev. William Matheson of the Celtic Department of the University of Edinburgh supported these conclusions regarding the cultural function of the daoín-uaisle in a personal interview in Edinburgh, April 1976.

Indeed, Reverend Patrick Stuart said of the old system:

The man who could best handle his sword and his gun was deemed the prettiest fellow and the attentive and industrious man was a character held in a degree of contempt. 53

It is certain that a chief would not "hold in contempt" any follower who made agricultural improvements. Indeed, the considerable debts that weighed down on the various Captains of Clan Ranald and the notable amounts of money that the kindred's gentlemen warriors were able to loan their chief demonstrates that profit was of considerable importance, but in relation to the daoín-uaisle, their station and the perceptions of their duties, these financial matters were considered secondary.

Highland society was set up to allow others to work the lands, thus leaving the duin-uasal, his brothers and his sons free to take part in military activities, to attend the chief, to perform errands for the clan, to practise their martial arts and to take part in activities such as hunting that would sharpen their military capabilities. To understand traditional Highland society and the changes that were to come, it is absolutely essential to grasp this basic point; the most important function of the daoín-uaisle was military, not economic. It should also be pointed out that this situation arose not in the minds of Victorian romantics, but developed from the grim and unromantic desire to survive in the often hostile environment of the 16th and 17th century Highlands. Indeed, as has been seen, the Gaels themselves called a substantial portion of this period Linn nan Creach, or "Age of Forays".

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53. Redcliffe N. Saloman, The History and Social Influence of the Potato, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1949), p.350.



Some writers have concluded that in early periods these daoín-uaisle did much of the fighting themselves.<sup>54</sup> In certain instances this was doubtless true. The daoín-uaisle were the best prepared and in a small expedition the chief would have selected his party from among the best of his daoín-uaisle. Moreover, in 1644 when John Moydartach, Captain of Clan Ranald, led the west Highland force into Montrose's army there were only 800

of the strongest and most valiant highlanders, well armed with habershoes, muniones and targates; for offensive armes, they had gunes, bowes, swords and aixes, called of some Loch-aber aixes. 55

This force was comprised of the MacDonalds of Glencoe, Glengarry, Keppoch, a few MacDonalds of Sleat, the Camerons and the Stewarts of Appin as well as the Clan Ranald; and, certainly, the Clan Ranald or the Clan Cameron alone could have raised close to 800 warriors with a total mobilisation, so it seems likely that in this case the west Highlanders were mainly comprised of warriors of the daoín-uaisle class and their near kin. But even in early periods this was not always true for individual west Highland kindreds or, indeed, for the army of the entire Lordship.

In 1545 when the west Highland chiefs gathered under the banner of Donald Dubh in Ireland, they were said to have over 4000 men at their command with them in Ireland and an equal number at home.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, in this case, and others, the total manpower potential was used. So, the conclusion that before the Montrose campaign only daoín-uaisle did the clan's fighting is not true in

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54. Kermack, op.cit., p.124.

55. See above, p.98.

56. See above, p.35.

every case. However, it does seem that the Montrose period saw a change in tactics and weaponry that made it easier and less expensive to arm the entire kindred.

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries the heavy, burdensome and expensive armour was slowly done away with and the expensive two-handed great sword was replaced by the basket hilted broadsword (although it kept the same name, "claidheamh mor" or claymore). These changes made it financially more feasible for the chief and his daoin-uaisle to arm larger numbers of the tenants and sub-tenants: thus, Highland armies were enabled to take full advantage of their untapped military potential. Thereafter, the full manpower of the kindred seems normally to have been employed and with the loss of the heavy armour and weaponry their load was lightened. This allowed the Gaels to use their natural ability to march long distances and to manoeuvre quickly. These factors, added to a corresponding loss of martial ardour among Lowland and Border Scots, who by this period had lost much of their own kin-based social organisation, combined to help Highland armies achieve a series of striking military successes.

A recent study argues convincingly that these developments in weaponry were combined with the traditional Irish tactics and use of the musket to create the effective "Highland charge" that so often was to bring victory to Highland armies over Lowland and English forces. Alasdair MacColla, Montrose's co-commander in 1644-45, is said to have blended these advances in weaponry with Irish tactics and Highland abilities and imported this method of war to the Scottish Highlands during the Montrose period. Certainly Alasdair MacColla, a Scottish Gael, had seen much action in Ireland and there is compelling documentation, indicating that he first used the "Highland charge" in

Ireland with his mixed Highland and Irish force at the Battle of Laney on 11th February 1642.<sup>57</sup>

In the Clan Ranald tacks there are no military clauses with the exception of the occasional reminder that the tacksman is to give the Captain of Clan Ranald his

personall service in hunting and hoasting as  
the rest of his kinsmen doe whnever they shall  
be requyred thrto. 58

And even this generalised clause was rare in Clan Ranald tacks.

This is in marked contrast to the tacks given out on Argyll's vast estates where the tacksmen were obliged to serve Argyll with the "haill tennants and inhabitants" of his lands "in all hostages and other lawful expeditions as oft and whenever they shall be desyred or required therto".<sup>59</sup> Clearly, the Captain of Clan Ranald felt he could take for granted the military service of his tacksmen and other daoine-uaisle.

Highland society was organised in a manner that allowed for rapid mobilisation. In the 1730's Captain Edward Burt recorded this useful description of this method of raising the clan.

On any sudden alarm and danger of distress to the chief, he gives notice of it throughout his own clan, and to such others as are in alliance with him. This is done by sending a signal, which they call a fiery-cross, being two sticks tied together transversely and burnt at the ends; with this, he sends directions in writing, to signify the place of rendezvous. And, when the principal person of any place has received this token he dismisses the messenger, and sends it forward to another; and so on, till all have received the intelligence. Upon the receipt of this signal, all that are near immediately leave

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57. See Stevenson, op.cit., pp.82-4 & 127.

58. RD3(Dur)/29/327(1672).

59. Cregean, op.cit., p.98.



their habitation and repair to the place appointed with their arms, and oatmeal for their provision. This they mingle with water of the next river or burn they come to, when hunger calls for a supply. 60

In this manner, using a chain of fresh runners as messengers, the kindred could be raised in a very rapid fashion. On the Breadalbane estate the fiery-cross once covered thirty-two miles in only three hours.<sup>61</sup> The "principal person of any place" mentioned above by Burt would normally have been either the area tacksman or one of his main tenants who would quickly gather and arm his people and report to the tacksman. All the townships in the tacksman's area would do the same and in this way every section of the chief's lands would be quickly notified, armed, provisioned and on the march to the designated clan gathering place under its military leader, the tacksman. For the Clan Ranald the traditional gathering place was the "plains of Tioram", the beach facing the kindred's island stronghold in Moidart, Castle Tioram, but, of course, if the tactical situation required any other point could be named as the gathering place.

Since the Clan Ranald was a large kindred, the tacksmen often served directly under one of the clan's major kinsmen-wadsetters and through him served the Captain of Clan Ranald. In the tacksman's own unit his sons and his main tenants, usually his kinsmen, acted as the lower cadre. Burt's mention of the oatmeal is also significant. Each man carried a fairly large quantity of oatmeal and this provided his basic stock of food. It was light and each man could carry his own supply, thus eliminating the need for a slow and restrictive

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60. Burt, op.cit., Vol. 2, pp.122-23.

61. Ibid.

supply train.

In a report, dated 29th December 1724, entitled "An Account of the Highlanders & Highlands of Scotland" by an unnamed Englishman who had served in the north, the importance of the tacksmen is mentioned. After saying that feudal superiorities are not the cause of the Highland people's "Slavish attachment [to their chiefs] & readiness to rebell", he states that Highlanders are under the influence "both of chieftains & of those under whom they dwell".<sup>62</sup> And in 1748, two years after the failure of the last Jacobite rising, a certain Murdoch MacLeod sent an intelligence report to Major-General Humphrey Bland concerning the area from Lochaber to the Clan Ranald's Moidart. He said that people, in the absence of the chiefs, continued to be "poison'd by their petty chieftains" and the priests.<sup>63</sup>

The Gaelic society had its own collection of heroic literature. These epics extolled the warrior virtues such as strength, courage and daring, and thus tended to put the daoin-uaisle in a flattering light in the eyes of their Gaelic contemporaries. These tales had been handed down from antiquity and preserved by a professional class of bards such as the Clan Ranald's MacMhuirichs. The stories were also carried on in a thriving folk culture among the more ordinary people. It is said that any stranger who could tell tales of the *Feinne* was sure to be a favoured guest among Highland folk.

When a stranger appeared, after the usual compliments, the first question was 'Bheil dad agad air na Fheinn?' (Do you know anything of the *Feinne*?) If the answer was in the affirmative the whole hamlet convened and midnight was usually the hour of separation. 64

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62. RH2/4/316/322.

63. RH2/4/367/138.

64. Grant, Folkways, op.cit., p.131.

The existence of such a healthy folk tradition, and one that often praised the martial virtues, not only strengthened the gentleman's belief in himself and in the importance of his position, it also tended to foster closer ties between duin-uasal and tenant.

Daniel Defoe penned two contemporary descriptions of Highlanders and it is thought that those described were daoine-uaisle.<sup>65</sup> The first appears in his Memoirs of a Cavalier.

Were their skill in exercise and discipline proportioned to their courage, they would make the bravest soldiers in the world. They are large bodies, and prodigiously strong; and two qualities they have above other nations, viz., hardy to endure hunger, cold and hardships, and wonderfully swift of foot. ... they are all gentlemen and proud enough to be kings. 66

The second description leaves a vivid impression of the appearance of a Highlander in the streets of Edinburgh in 1706. Despite Defoe's obvious prejudice, the pride and confidence of the Highlander when facing the alien and sometimes hostile culture of Edinburgh is obvious. The passage is also useful because of its description of the considerable array of weaponry commonly carried by the Highland gentleman of the period. Defoe leaves no doubt as to the martial attitude of these men.

They are formidable fellows and I only wish His Majesty had 25,000 of them in Spain, as a nation equally proud and barbarous like themselves. They are all gentlemen, will take affront from no man, and are insolent to the last degree. But certainly the absurdity is ridiculous to see a man in his mountain habit, armed with a broadsword, target, pistol, at his girdle a dagger, and staff, walking down the High Street as upright and haughty as if he were a lord, and withall driving a cow! Bless us - are these the gentlemen! said I. 67

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65. Kermack, op.cit., p.128.

66. Ibid.

67. Saloman, op.cit., p.353.



Stewart of Garth gives another interesting description of a party marching along the side of Loch Lomond during the Rebellion of 1715.

That night they arrived at Luss, where they were joined by Sir Humphrey Colquhoun of Luss, and James Grant of Pluscarden, his son-in-law, followed by forty or fifty stately fellows in their hose and belted plaids, armed each of them with a well-fixed gun on their shoulders, a strong handsome target, with a sharp pointed steel, of about an ell in length screwed into the navel of it, on his arm, a sturdy claymore by his side, and a pistol or two, with a dirk and knife in his belt. 68

One further point should be made in regard to the daoine-uisle concerning their military function; a point seldom, if ever, made. Despite the glamour built up around war and military exploits by many cultures, including the Gaelic culture, it is certain that the realities of war have seldom, if ever, been glamorous. The duine-uisal was born into a station that often required the ultimate sacrifice of him and his kin. The significant Highland losses that were discussed above<sup>69</sup> at the Battle of Killiecrankie fell almost entirely upon the duine-uisal class because they stood in the front rank of their clan regiment. Certainly, the daoine-uisle enjoyed economic and social benefits, but benefits paid for on the field of battle. Indeed, in every battle discussed in this study the losses were quite disproportionately high in this class. Many writers, full of preconceived attitudes and lacking a historical perspective, never seem to tire of pointing out the anachronistic nature of the daoine-uisle, their economic, agricultural and social shortcomings, but these same writers always fail to mention that very few instances are known of where the daoine-uisle failed to perform what they felt to be

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68. Stewart, op.cit., p.84.

69. See above, pp.176-77.

their major duty, military service for the clan. Despite the risks and dangers, these men uniformly and admirably performed what they and their society felt to be their principal function and they deserve to be judged, at least in part, according to this criterion.

In the Wardlaw Manuscript Master James Fraser says "Highland fewds never dies" and the impression gained from many other studies on the 17th and 18th century Highlands is one of a society almost perpetually embroiled in strife and war. This was not the case. While Fraser seems to have a point, it is important to remember that peace not war was the natural Highland condition. A study such as this must deal with the military aspects of Gaelic society, but it is important not to over-emphasise them. This is not always easy as the bulk of literature and, indeed, most historical studies have tended to emphasise these military aspects (or are equally incorrect in ignoring them). It is all too easy to fall into the predominant and erroneous pattern set by the bulk of these works and to over-stress these military aspects.

To put this topic in a more realistic perspective, it should be remembered that the last inter-clan battle was fought at Mulroy as early as 1688 and that only six of the following fifty-eight years (up to 1746) saw any large Highland military undertaking and that in only one of these years was the majority of the clans involved. But having made this point, it, too, must be qualified. Highland society, and especially the position of the daoine-uaisle, was based on the protection of the kindred and its lands. The traditional Clan Ranald was organised so that it could mobilise quickly. Even in the long periods of peace the military capability of the clan continued to exist and it is incorrect to see the 1745-46 episode as

the death knell of the Clan Ranald's military capability. In the 1750's clan organisation had been kept intact and in a state of military preparedness on the forfeited estates of Lochail, Barrisdale and Kinlochmoidart.<sup>70</sup> And, certainly, on the remainder of the Clan Ranald estate, which had escaped forfeiture, both the ability and inclination to wage war had been maintained.<sup>71</sup> As late as 1820, when the Chief of Grant and his sisters had been blocked in their Elgin townhouse by an angry urban mob, the fiery-cross was sent through the Grant estate. The call was answered and the siege raised by 800 of Grant's followers.<sup>72</sup> The political situation between Grant, whose brother was standing for Parliament, and the Elgin citizens is not relevant to this study, the fact that the ancient fiery-cross was answered as late as 1820 is relevant.

Clearly, the Highlands of the period present a complex situation. While it must be remembered peace was the common Highland condition, still the society had a fundamental military base and this underlying organisation continued to exist long after the 1745-46 Rising, though in a slow, uneven decline.

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All Clan Ranald daoine-uaisle performed these functions, military and otherwise, for the kindred, but all were not tacksmen. The term daoine-uaisle denoted individuals of a certain rank, the nobles of the kindred, and they could hold land in ways other than

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70, Eric Cregean, ed. Argyll Estate Instructions, Mull, Morvern, Tiree, 1777-1805, (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1964), p.xxii.

71. See below, p.467.

72. Iain Moncreiffe, The Highland Clans, (London: Barrie & Rock-cliff, 1967), p.23.



the tack. One method was the feu. An individual who held land in this manner was known as a feuer and he occupied a special position. Often the land involved was not of any greater size or value than that of a substantial tacksman, but in a sense a petty feuer was a man of more substance than his tacksman neighbour, because he and his descendents held these lands in feu forever. This permanent tenure was given in return for the payment of a yearly feu duty to the proprietor and certain casualties. In some areas in the Highlands, such as the Grant holdings in Strath Spey, land was fairly often feued out to younger sons of chiefs, but the permanent nature of the tenure made it much less common in the western Highlands and Hebrides.

In 1662 Donald MacDonald of Clan Ranald gave John MacEachen of Howbeg a permanent feu. Later, in 1748, John's grandson, Ranald MacEachen, still held the lands and presented a copy of his grandfather's Charter of Confirmation to the surveyors of the Forfeited Estates Commission. The charter stated that Howbeg, in South Uist, was

To be Holden by the said John McEachen and his  
forsaids [descendants] heritably of the said  
Donald McDonald his Heirs and successors in  
Feu form and Heritage for ever, the said John  
McEachen and his forsaids Rendering and paying  
to the said Donald McDonald and his forsaids  
superiors there of yearly the sum of sixty  
marks Scotts money, Four Bolls of Bear Meal, &  
five stones of Butter. 73

The other important method of land holding for the daoín-uaisle was the wadset. This was basically a financial arrangement; its primary purpose was to allow a duin-uasal of some means to help the chief with his growing debts. The majority of these agreements were made in the late 17th and early 18th centuries<sup>74</sup> and because the

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73. E744/1/p.39. (The direct descendants of these MacEachens still live in Howbeg, South Uist.)

74. Shaw, op.cit., p.43.

wadset was often used to raise large sums of money, wadsetters tended to be especially important members of their kindred's daoín-uaisle class; certainly this was true in the Clan Ranald. It should, however, be noted that these particular daoín-uaisle did not achieve their position of power in the Clan Ranald by virtue of holding a wadset, rather they tended to be given wadsets because of their high birth, notable holdings and position in the kindred, all of which left them financially attractive as potential wadsetters to a debt-ridden chief. In this study the Clan Ranald wadsetters will be referred to as "kinsmen-wadsetters" in order to differentiate them from the several individuals such as Argyll and MacLeod of Hamara who were given wadsets at various periods for purely financial reasons and thus performed none of the important functions of the kindred's true wadsetter.

Basically, a wadset was a financial agreement in which a chief conveyed a substantial portion of land to gain a certain amount of money or to satisfy an existing debt; sometimes, a series of obligations or duties were also conferred in this contract. Later, after a specified length of time, that chief, or more likely one of his descendents, had the option to pay back the money and thus recover the lands. As is seen above in Argyll's case, the transaction could be for purely financial reasons and other than the payment of certain or all of the rent and duties of the land in question to the outsider, the internal workings of the kindred were not altered. However, when the wadset went out to a member of the Clan Ranald it became an agreement quite different from this simple financial transaction. Indeed, when Argyll held his wadset from John Moydartach, there were several of the Clan Ranald's true kinsmen-

wadsetters on the lands in question and they continued to perform their traditional functions and certainly the Captain of Clan Ranald and his kinsmen-wadsetters maintained the internal control of the area.

In the traditional period a clan was first and foremost a fighting unit and its lands offered a place to settle needy and loyal kinsmen. Before the Jacobite rebellion of 1745-46 no Captain of Clan Ranald would allow outsiders to be planted in his own tactical base. While it is true that the very necessity of granting a wadset to an outsider was something of a sign of weakness and while this must have complicated matters to a certain degree, the Chief of Clan Ranald did retain his kin-based control of these wadset lands and he retained the right to plant his own people. The outsider-wadsetter was only permitted to gather rents from the (sometimes hostile) Clan Ranald locals. In the Judicial Rental of 12th August 1718, Donald MacDonald of Neither Grueline in the Island of Eigg testified that "about Twenty years ago" Allan MacDonald "Capt. of Clanronald" gave a wadset of certain lands in Eigg to Sir Ruairi MacLeod of Talisker (son of Sir Ruairi MacLeod of Dunvegan) and Donald of Neither Grueline contined, "synce that tyme he [Donald] paid to Tallascar & his representatives yearly one hundred pounds Scots money & no more".<sup>75</sup> Later, in that same Judicial Rental "John MacKury" and other tenants in Eigg on Talisker's wadset made it clear that the wadset rights to Sir Ruairi were only financial. The government's surveyor recorded that MacKury and others stated,

There could be no tack granted by Talasker on this Estate because the Tenants declair the late Capt. of Clanranald prefered to

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75. GD201/5/1257/ 51.



himself the power of keeping in his own  
Kinsmen as tenants. 76

While dealing with the various levels of the kindred's structure, one point should be made. The traditional and somewhat simplistic view of a Highland clan is that of the chief, the tacksmen (usually close relatives of the current or a recent chief) and various tenants.

The possessors of land, over the Highlands in general, are of three different kinds, tacksmen, tenants and subtenants. The tacksmen hold their land of the proprietor, by lease; the tenants hold their farms, without lease, at the will of the landlord; the subtenants have small possessions of land, let out to them from year to year by the tacksmen and tenants.

The tacksmen are a superior order of people in the community. They are generally relations to the proprietor, and often men of education and of considerable endowments. 77

For a small clan this simplistic picture has some validity, but for a major kindred with large tracts of land under its control such as the Clan Ranald, it will not do. The above depiction will not serve in regard to the Clan Ranald because it ignore the more important wadsetters, and because it gives a far too elementary description of a large kindred's tacksmen. Interestingly, while the above picture of the tacksmen's being relations to the chief will not serve for the complex Clan Ranald, it does accurately describe most of this kindred's wadsetters. The Clan Ranald's wadsetters were close relations of the current or a recent chief. But the kindred's tacksmen were a far more complex lot as has been seen.

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76. GD201/5/1257/58.

77. John Walker, An Economical History of the Hebrides and Highlands of Scotland, Vol.2, (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1808), pp.51-56.

An interesting comment is made in a report on the growth of popery preserved in the General Assembly Papers. It is dated 4th April 1729 and concerns the MacDonnells of Keppoch.

The great advantages which one Priest MacDonald who resides & Trafficks in that Parish has from his being link'd in blood relation with Keppoch & most of all the Gentlemen in that parish. 78

This document's notable religious significance will be discussed later, but here it is of interest because it shows that both the priest, Peter MacDonnell, and the Keppoch chief, Alexander MacDonnell, were "link'd in blood relation with ... most of all the Gentlemen in that parish". So, here, in this smaller kindred, the image of most of the clan's tacksmen being close relations to the chief holds true. This was not the case with the tacksmen in the larger, more complex Clan Ranald; it was, however, true concerning the Clan Ranald wadsetters. Why did this situation exist? Both chiefs, of the smaller Keppoch kindred and of the larger Clan Ranald, would have had a fairly equal, constant and steady supply of able and needy brothers, uncles and cousins to furnish with positions. In the smaller kindred only the limited amount of land usually let out in a tack or small wadset was available, but in a larger and more complex kindred such as the Clan Ranald valuable and ambitious kinsmen could occasionally be settled at the wadsetter level; indeed, these were the most sought-after positions and for the other relations a variety of other holdings were usually available.

The progenitors of all major Clan Ranald kinsmen-wadsetter families were sons of chiefs. The MacDonalds of Morar were descended from Allan, the son of Dugall MacRanald the deposed Clan Ranald chief.

From John Og, the son of John Moydartach of the Blar na Leine campaign, are traced the MacDonalds of Glenalladale. Another of this John Moydartach's sons, Allan, became Captain of Clan Ranald and his sons, Ranald and John, are the ancestors of the MacDonalds of Benbecula and Kinlochmoidart respectively. And, finally, from Alexander, the son of Donald, Tutor of Benbecula and later Captain of Clan Ranald, were descended the MacDonalds of Boisdale. There were, of course, other individuals in the Clan Ranald who held wadsets of smaller extent such as Ranald MacDonald of Milton in South Uist<sup>79</sup> and the Reverend Alexander MacDonald, minister of Elanfinnan,<sup>80</sup> and on a smaller scale they operated much like the other more substantial wadsetters.

With their kinsman, the chief, these major daoin-uaisle stood at the top of an institution that was designed primarily for war. When the kindred mobilised the wadsetter would lead the people over whom he had control and this group would include a variety of tacksmen, their tenants and sub-tenants. The Clan Ranald "regiment" would be comprised of "companies" led by Morar, Benbecula, Glenalladale and Kinlochmoidart. On several occasions, the Clan Ranald being such a large, powerful and conservative kindred, its individual kinsmen-wadsetters achieved such a position in the west Highland power structure in their own rights to be named along with area clan chiefs on the government's and the Kirk of Scotland's list of major enemies. For example, in 1720 the compilers of the Records of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland mentioned "Glengerrie and Keppoch" in one section "Glencoe" in another and "the Captain of Clanranald"

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79. CH2/557/5/p.257.

80. GD201/5/1257/5/ 96.



in a third and later in the text it is noted that in "Moydart and Airissag" three priests

continually live and avowedly exercise their offices in meeting houses built for the purpose, which three priests are generally encouraged and chiefly supported by Ronald McDonald of Kenlochmoydart, who has come of that branch of Clanronald's Estate.

When this report mentions the Isle of Eigg; it states

thr are about ffour hundered Inhabitants  
ffreinds and dependents of the Captain of  
Clanronald, who are all Roman Catholicks ...  
and are all encouraged chiefly by Allan  
McDonald Laird of Morhir [Morar] who Lives  
there. 81

An earlier list of the "heads of popish clans" in about 1707 includes these "chiefs", "Glengarrie old and young, Captain of Clanronald, Bara, Moror [and] Benbecula"; this same report goes on to state that

The priests have all manner of encouradgement  
from the foursaid gentlemen and especially  
from [Donald MacDonald of] Beinbecula a most  
cunning and violent papist. 82

In these reports the Clan Ranald wadsetters Benbecula, Morar and Kinlochmoidart are all given positions equal to or even greater than chiefs of other clans. Clearly, a Clan Ranald wadsetter was a man of influence both inside and outside his kindred.

In a wadset dated 30th May 1676, between Alexander MacDonald of Kinlochmoidart and Donald of Clan Ranald several interesting services are listed. In addition to the personal service in hunting and hosting "as the rest of his kinsmen do, whenever they shall be required", also Alexander was to "entertain their hawks and dogs their keepers". Kinlochmoidart was to give to Clanranald "the

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81. GD201/5/1257/1/ 9.

82. CH1/2/29/p.569.

haill services be sea and land" and protect, "skaithless keep", him from "thefts, robberies, slaughters, depredations, mullities, fines and other". And, finally, with the Small Isles holdings of Eigg and Canna in mind, lying between Alexander's lands on the mainland and South Uist, it was agreed that

if it shall happen the said Alexander M'Donald to be stormstaid [stormbound] at any time, within the bounds of the said Donald M'Donald his commandment, between the mainland and Island of Uist; in that case the said Donald M'Donald hereby grants licence and tolerance to them to uplift the first three nights meat frae his countrymen, and the rest of their remaining days, to be upon their own proper charges and expences. 83

Clearly, in the Clan Ranald both in times of peace and war the duties of a duin-uasal who held a wadset were roughly the same as one who held a tack or feu, except that the wadsetter often had a larger area and more people, including tacksmen, under his charge.

While most of the above duties are straightforward, Kinloch-moidart's instructions to "skaithless keep" Donald of Clan Ranald from "thefts, robberies, slaughters [and] depredations" is interesting, if unclear. But two other references clear this confusion. In the Locheil Charter Chest Inventory there is mention of a contract between Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil and Allan MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald (Donald's son), dated 29th November 1699 and, the following year, a similar contract between Locheil and Ranald MacDonald, Allan of Clan Ranald's brother, both agreements are "for suppressing of Theft within the Estates of Locheil and Muidart".<sup>84</sup> And, finally, the Moidart priest, Charles MacDonald, stated that one of Kinloch-

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83. GD50/216/40.

84. GD1/658/1/p.49.

moidart's basic functions as a wadsetter had been to hold Clan Ranald's flank against theft and raids, mostly from Lochail's people.<sup>85</sup> So, here is another function of a Clan Ranald kinsmen-wadsetter, to serve as the director of his district's frontier guard, to protect his area from any sort of incursion or possibly to respond to a successful raid with a similar retaliatory expedition into the offending kindred's bounds; although on a smaller scale a tacksman would also have performed this function.

Religion is of central importance to this inquiry and it will be dealt with in other sections, but in this portion concerning the Clan Ranald kinsmen-wadsetters, it must be noted that the Clan Ranald was a solidly catholic kindred and its wadsetters performed a religious service to the Catholic Church commensurate with their notable standing within and without the Clan Ranald. An undated document found in the records of the General Assembly goes into fair detail concerning the Clan Ranald as a catholic kindred and the significance of the kindred's wadsetters in religious matters is made obvious. The report, entitled "A List of the Papists in the parish of Islandfinan, viz. Mudart, Arisaig & Moihire", was written by James Stevenson, who was minister of Ardnamurchan, and from the dates when he served that parish and the date of the death of Allan of Clan Ranald who is mentioned, the report must have been written between October 1703 and November 1715.

The Laird of Clan Ronald [Allan MacDonald]  
superior of all these lands is popish himself

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85. Rev. Charles Macdonald, Moidart; or Among the Clanranalds, (Oban: Duncan Cameron, 1889), pp.56-57.



and ffamelly, he dwells in Uist and keeps a priest in his ffamellie hidden.

The Laird of Morhir & Lady with all his children & Servants are popish the priest resides there

[there follows a list of 67 "popish" families]...

Kenlochmoidart himself wife child & serv. are popish, he educates all his children popish & also his eldest son who is his aire is educated popish the priests resides as I am informed often there.

Glenaldale himself and all his family and tennents are popish.

These forsd. Gentlemen viz Kenloch & Glenaldale are of a considerable interest in Moidart.

Mr. Ronald, the captaine of Clanronald's brother is popish and all his tennents [a list of 12 catholic families follows] ...

These are all tht I could get a list of, for there are many more subtennents tht I could not get a list of as yit, but the gentlemen tht has authoritie in Mudoit Arisack and Morhire, at whose command all the rest of the tennents are:

1. The laird of Cl:Ronald popish.
2. Mr. Ronald his brother Germone popish.
3. The Laird of Morhire popish.
4. Kenlochmoidart in Moidart Popish.
5. Glenaldail popish.

These are the Leaders of the blind; & encouragers of priests. 86

Clearly, the major Clan Ranald wadsetters, the kindred's more powerful daoin-uaisle, performed useful functions. Their chiefs ruled over a considerable territory and this area was divided either by long sea lochs or open tracts of ocean. For much of the period that concerns this inquiry, all of these areas were in danger of invasion from a variety of enemies. No Captain of Clan Ranald could be everywhere on his estate and it was not realistic to hope that a variety of tacksmen could always act quickly in concert.

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86. CH1/2/29/p.565. It should be noted that the Clan Ranald wadsetter Donald MacDonald of Benbecula was of equal power in the west Highland catholic hierarchy (indeed, in one document he is singled out as an even more notable "papist" than other area leaders, CH1/2/29/p.569), but since he resided in another parish, he was not mentioned in Stevenson's report.

Between the chiefs and these tacksmen stood the wadsetters. These highly placed MacDonald daoine-uisle managed and protected their districts. Indeed, certain of these Clan Ranald wadsetters were powerful west Highland leaders in their own right.

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It is difficult to over-emphasise the importance of the daoine-uisle to traditional Gaelic culture; they were at home with both the chief and the tenants. While the old society flourished there was a strong sense of unity and obligation between ranks and there was no separate distinct peasant culture. All members of the clan felt themselves to be members of one great family or to be attached to that family (and its rise or fall) by need and tradition. While the daoine-uisle were overseers on their lands, they were neither foreign nor conquerors. They were united with both upper and lower orders by a belief in their common ancestor, more recent kinship, language, tradition, religion and the necessity for common defence. Much of this shared culture naturally flowed through and was encouraged by the daoine-uisle. And long into the coming period of change and social crisis the Clan Ranald daoine-uisle were to remain as a distinctive and, to the common folk of the kindred, an often sympathetic force in the structure of Highland society.

## CHAPTER V

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At a 15th century dinner held in Aros Castle on the Island of Mull by Alexander, Lord of the Isles, places of honour went to "Beaton, the principal physician, then MacMhuirich, the poet",<sup>1</sup> the Lord's most respected aes dana, or "folk of gifts". At the beginning of the 18th century Allan MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald, could boast that his Ormiclate Castle table in South Uist also had places of honour for the Clan Ranald's own aes dana, Fergus Beaton, the physician, and Donald MacMhuirich, the poet; and in this South Uist court could also be found the kindred's hereditary MacIntyre pipers and a family of harpers who seem destined to remain nameless. In the 17th and 18th centuries few west Highland kindreds could hope to rival the Clan Ranald in terms of the impressive lineage of its professionals. Indeed, one of the field's most respected scholars has noted that of all branches of the Clan Donald, the Clan Ranald "inherited a richer strain of the old culture than did other branches".<sup>2</sup> And in all the region only the Dunvegan Gaelic establishment of the Clan MacLeod came close to this Clan Ranald excellence.

All these Clan Ranald aes dana were members of the kindred's duin-uasal class. In terms of material well-being and prestige, the MacMhuirichs, Beatons and MacIntyres were on a roughly equal footing with other Clan Ranald daoine-uaisle, with one difference; the position of these clan professionals was not based on high birth but on the

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1. Hugh MacDonald, "History of the MacDonalds", Highland Papers, J.R.N. MacPhail, ed., Vol.I, (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1914), p.45.
  2. Derick Thomson, "Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati", Scottish Studies, Vol.12, (Edinburgh: University Press, 1968), p.62.



standing of the professional family involved.

At the head of the Clan Ranald's impressive entourage of literary men, poets, historians, genealogists, physicians, musicians, lawmen, record keepers and scribes came the proud bardic family of MacMhuirich. In its own long and impressive history, this literary family claimed to have had its origins with an 8th century Irish king, Fearghal mac Maoile Duin and sometime in the 12th century seems to have become established among the literary elite of Ireland. The Annals of the Four Masters, an Irish chronicle dated 1185 mentions the death of Mael Iosa O Dalaigh, Ollamh<sup>3</sup> of Ireland and Scotland. From this Irish bardic family of O Dalaigh (O'Daly) are traced the MacMhuirichs of the Clan Ranald.

One poet of this Irish line, Aenghus O Dalaigh, had six sons and two of them became poets of great renown. The eldest, Donnchadh Mor, was probably the most notable Irish religious poet of the Middle Ages and the second founded Scotland's foremost bardic family, the MacMhurichs. This man, Muireadhach Lessa-an-doill, became known as Muireadhach Albanach on his flight to Scotland. To this individual are ascribed at least twenty poems; he seems to have made circuits of Scotland, also taking part in the Fifth Crusade, and was associated with Alun, one of the Celtic Earls of Lennox. It has been speculated that one or more of this family came to hold bardic office with Somerled's descendants in the Isles before 1300 AD.<sup>4</sup> but this is uncertain. What is sure is that by the 15th century there is a variety of evidence in literary, traditional and documentary forms,

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3. The highest grade of file or poet in Dark Age Ireland.

4. Derick Thomson, "The MacMhuirich Bardic Family", Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, Vol.xliii, p.61.

that ties the MacMhuirichs into the service of the Lords of the Isles.

In 1411 one of these poets, Lauchlan Mor MacMhuirich, composed a brosnachadh catha, an incitement to battle before the Battle of Harlaw.

O children of Conn, remember  
 Hardihood in time of battle ...  
 Be angry, be ardent,  
 be ape-like, be athletic,  
 be bloody, be blustering,  
 be bear-like, be barbarous ... 5  
 be strong, nursing your wrath ...  
 be valiant, triumphant ...  
 O Children of Conn of the Hundred Battles,  
 now is the time for you to win recognition,  
 O raging whelps  
 O sturdy bears,  
 O most sprightly lions,  
 O battle-loving warriors,  
 O brave, heroic firebrands,  
 the Children of Conn of the Hundred Battles -  
 O children of Conn remember  
 Hardihood in time of battle. 6

While serving under the Island Lords, the MacMhuirich family held extensive lands in South Kintyre and, interestingly, their near neighbours were the professional harpists to the Lords of the Isles, the MacIlshenaichs, now scotticized to MacShannon. These artistic families appear to have been placed together because the duty of the medieval Irish and Scottish harpist was to accompany the recitation of the chief poet's most elaborate poetry.<sup>7</sup>

This fascinating situation was not to last. Gaels have ever suffered the fate of their chiefs and with the 1493 forfeiture of the Lordship and its eventual collapse, the MacMhuirichs too found their world seriously altered. Sometime between 1541 and 1596 they either

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5. These four lines illustrate, in an English version, the poem's original Gaelic alphabetic construction with groups of four epithets together beginning with the same letter and continuing through the alphabet in order.
6. Thomson, Introduction to Gaelic Poetry, op.cit., pp.30-31,
7. Bannerman, Lordship, op.cit., p.233.

gave up or lost the hereditary Kintyre holdings and moved under Clan Ranald protection, taking up lands in South Uist. There seem to have been several reasons behind this MacMhuirich selection of the Clan Ranald as its future patron-kindred. The failure of Donald Dubh's major attempt to restore the Lordship in 1545, on his untimely death, made any return to the old status quo extremely unlikely and at the same time made the Kintyre holdings even more tenuous. This dark situation coupled with the obvious conservatism of the Clan Ranald's John Moydartach, of the Blar na Leine campaign, his notable string of successes, his ever-growing power and reputation doubtless inclined the equally conservative and realistic MacMhuirichs to view the Clan Ranald with favour.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, this bardic family, ever noted for its practical qualities, would have weighed heavily the offer of the desirable, lucrative and isolated lands of Stilligarry and Drimsdale in South Uist. So, while certain MacMhuirichs went off to find employment with the MacLeods, the MacDonalds of Sleat and the Campbells, the main line of the MacMhuirich kindred settled itself in the Clan Ranald's Outer Hebridean holdings.

While their circumstances were somewhat reduced under the Captains of Clan Ranald, the atmosphere was right and the MacMhuirichs continued to produce fine poetry and useful history and to enjoy an honoured position in Gaelic society for generations. When considering the specific functions of the MacMhuirichs and especially their duties in the Clan Ranald's court, one thought should be borne in mind. One of the field's most respected scholars has speculated

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8. Much of the information in the above four paragraphs was found in Derick Thomson's "Bardic Family", op.cit., pp.276-98 and his "Learned Orders", op.cit., p.62.



that on a reduced level the court of the Lord of the Isles may have mirrored that of the early Gaelic kingdom of Scotland and also that "in the more confined activities of Clan Ranald's court a reflection of conditions at the court of the Lord of the Isles"<sup>9</sup> can be seen. Without doubt, the Clan Ranald placed a high value on tradition and its geographical, political and religious situation lent itself to that point of view; the lingering aspects of the traditional culture seen in the Clan Ranald give as good an insight into what went before as can be found.

In the Clan Ranald the MacMhuirichs functioned as poets, genealogists and historians to the kindred. In the Judicial Rental of 1718 Donald MacMhuirich states that "his prediceors & himself" occupied their lands from the family of Clanranald "for Registering the Deeds & Genealogie of the family & making panegyrics & C".<sup>10</sup> Earlier, in 1707, this same Donald had been given a tack by Allan of Clan Ranald and this document gives further evidence concerning the position of this bardic family within the Clan Ranald. Donald was given the tack of Stilligarry by Allan "during all the days of his life time", but also the lands were to go to Donald's

Heirs procreat of his own body who shall be capable of serving me [Allan] and my Heirs & Successors in the station & office he presently Serves me in, and failing of Heirs of his own body I bind and oblige me & my forsaied to warrand and give Tack into any other of the same clan and tribe of McMureach that shall be capable to serve me & my forsaied in the station & office. 11

For the MacMhuirichs this "station" was a complex one.

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9. Thomson, "Learned Orders", op.cit., p.72.

10. GD201/5/1257/5/ 105.

11. GD201/2/4.

They were to entertain in the chief's court with Gaelic sagas and recently written poems such as elegies and eulogies, often accompanied by the harpist. When the Captain of Clan Ranald journeyed to the court of a neighbouring chief, he would have taken his own retinue of Gaelic artists, led by the chief MacMhuirich bard of the period, and at that court the services of all the attending kindreds' "folk of gifts" would be pooled. As has been seen in Lauchlan Mor MacMhuirich's poem recited before the Battle of Harlaw, the bard was to incite the clan to a battle pitch before a conflict; the assembled warriors were urged to model their deeds on the prowess and courage of their forebears. Recent successes were vaunted and failures excused by the poet. He praised powerful men and women in life and eulogised them in death. Political verse was constructed and it worked as propaganda for the Captain of Clan Ranald and his party; enemies were satirised, belittled and scorned. And, certainly, these MacMhuirichs simply wrote beautiful verse on poetic themes such as love and nature. Sadly, few examples of this last type of poetry have survived (praise-poems to a powerful chief more readily finding their way into the clan's archives), but enough of this type of non-official poetry has survived to testify to the talents and artistic nature of the bards. However, it is necessary to balance this pleasant thought and remember that the MacMhuirich poets were also professional bards.

It was the function of the professional bards to make their patrons look good and if they performed this task well then they could expect to be well rewarded. The MacMhuirichs expected to be well rewarded and a generous Captain of Clan Ranald expected a "good press". There is ample evidence to show that the MacMhuirichs

felt profit to be their due and that they were well treated. For example, in the elegy for Donald, son of John Moydartach of the Montrose wars, Niall MacMhuirich states about Donald of Clan Ranald that

I never saw one like him for openness of disposition, for purity of character, for liberality, for excellence in (giving) goods and chattels -...

He was the great nourisher and fosterer of our schools of poets, his, O God, is a heavy loss for us; ...

Donald, while he was alive, never kept back from me anything that I asserted was due to me as a reward; in the gap of danger he was not weak, my white sun, he who did not hoard cattle. 12

This sort of testimony coupled with the long occupation of the lands in South Uist indicates that the MacMhuirichs were well rewarded for their service. That they performed their function of praising the various Captains of Clan Ranald, as well as the kindred itself, is manifest throughout the "Book of Clan Ranald". This give-and-take situation between the chiefs of the Clan Ranald and their hereditary bards worked well but what of the others, such as Sir Ruairi Mor and Sir Norman MacLeod of Dunvegan, Sir Ruairi and John MacLeod of Talisker, and several MacKenzies of Gairloch<sup>13</sup> who also received favourable mention in MacMhuirich poetry? On one level it seems that these individuals had often welcomed the visiting Clan Ranald bards with liberal hospitality when the poets were on their own circuits visiting chiefs, daoine-uaisle and other poets, but also there was another special reason beyond this obvious motive for the MacMhuirichs to support these non-Clan Ranald individuals. They were

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12. Thomson, Introduction to Gaelic Poetry, op.cit., pp.25-27.

13. Ibid., p.146; Thomson, "Bardic Family", op.cit., p.299, and Cameron, ed. (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., pp.265-75.



often, along with the Captains of Clan Ranald, the men of power and influence who were most favourably disposed towards the old culture. Both Sir Ruairi Mor and Iain Breac MacLeod kept full Gaelic establishments.<sup>14</sup> The MacMhuirichs doubtless saw it in their own interest to praise and thus help to build up these traditionally minded men.

Only in the traditional Gaelic world did the MacMhuirich bard find his raison d'etre. The professionals of Gaelic society, especially the bards, found their position of privilege and, even more, their very livelihoods directly threatened by the deterioration of traditional Gaelic society. It was the function of the MacMhuirich professional bard to praise that traditional world and it was very much in his own interest to do so because in buttressing that conservative society he was supporting the society that had a special place for him, his family, his kindred and their descendants. He was in a good position to see the stresses and disruptive factors working on the fabric of west Highland society and he had the skill, the desire and the established platform from which to champion the old ways. But in this search for rational explanations of this defensive bardic position, one must not lose sight of a simple human element. These poets cared for what they did; they felt their work was artistic and thus important. Why should they not have defended it on those grounds? The MacMhuirichs performed a useful and much appreciated function for their fellow Gaels. It seems only fair and just to ascribe to them, at least in part, an equally human motive, the appreciation of literature, poetry and art (that of their own culture), for defending their own positions as poets

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14. MacDonalds, Clan Donald, op.cit., Vol.III, p.134.

in traditional Gaeldom.

From a variety of Gaelic sources it is possible to reconstruct an evening's entertainment in a conservative clan seat and this will help to create an understanding and appreciation for the hospitable and artistic side of traditional Gaelic culture. This material should represent a serious counter-balance to the reams of documents and books that only present the Gaelic society as one of blood-feud and war. One of these Gaelic poems was written by Niall Mor MacMhuirich and was probably about the several days' amusements that surrounded the marriage of Sir Donald MacAllan of Clan Ranald's son, the young John Moydartach, to Sir Ruairi Mor MacLeod's daughter, Mor, that took place in 1613 in Sir Ruairi Mor's Dunvegan court. All the following Gaelic verse either pertains to the Clan Ranald or to that Dunvegan court and is from the same period. Niall Mor sang of the Dunvegan festivities:

Six nights I had been in the Dun,  
It was not a fallacious entertainment I received;  
Plenty of ale was drunk at the board,  
There was a large wine-hall and a numerous host.  
The attendants of the house were on every side,  
It was a cheerful great clan; ...  
The merriment of the harp and of the full bowls,  
With which hatred and treachery are not usually  
accompanied;  
The laughter of the fair-haired youngsters,  
We had inebriating ale and a blazing fire ... 15

In this same poem Niall Mor shows that the spirit of good cheer was not lacking either sense when he says "We were twenty times drunk every day, to which we had no more objection than did he [Sir Ruairi Mor?]" . The MacLeod poetess Mairi Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh gives a woman's view of Sir Ruairi Mor's entertainments:

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15. Cameron, ed., (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, pp.285-87.

In his great house  
 I have been joyful,  
 Dancing merry  
 on a wide floor,  
 The fiddle-playing  
 to put me to sleep,  
 The pipe playing  
 to wake me in the morning. 16

Of this same court Ruairi Morrison, the blind harper, has left an impression. He says there was singing, dancing to music played by a fiddle and a game played on a board that employed dice, probably backgammon.<sup>17</sup> In a poem composed by Mairi, the wife of Sir Donald MacAllan of Clan Ranald, on his death in 1618, she recalls amusements in his castle. She mentions many of the above sort of diversions such as piping, dicing and the activities of poets, but to this she adds an interesting early reference to whisky. Moreover, she says that use was made of books of history in red bindings, possibly a reference to the famous Red Book of Clan Ranald, but it is of interest to note in passing that her references both to the "books" and red "bindings" are in the plural.<sup>18</sup> The court of Sir Donald MacDonald of Sleat was said to enjoy draughts, cards, dice, wrestling and even football.<sup>19</sup> And Iain Breac MacLeod of Dunvegan is recorded as having employed a fool in addition to his bard, harpist, piper and fiddler.<sup>20</sup>

All this Gaelic verse leaves a vivid image of a wild and cheerful throng, a gay sort of atmosphere in which bards, harpers, pipers and fiddlers abounded and into which the other Gaels would join with dances and songs. Games with cards and dice were common;

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16. Thomson, Introduction to Gaelic Poetry, op.cit., p.134.

17. Rev. William Matheson, ed., The Blind Harper, (Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark, 1970), p.lii.

18. Thomson, "Learned Orders", op.cit., p.71.

19. MacDonalds, Clan Donald, op.cit., Vol.III, p.120.

20. Ibid., p.134.



draughts and chess were certainly known. Before a blazing fire at the great table, food and drink were plentiful and old warriors told the young ones of gallant actions of earlier times. Later, when all had settled into their beds for the night, the harpist lulled the house to sleep with a lullaby played in the great hall, its gentle soothing melody drifting throughout the quiet castle; and in the morning it was the piper's turn to rouse the company with a spirited tune played in that same great hall.<sup>21</sup>

There was, as ever, one other very human diversion occupying the thoughts of these Gaels at their gatherings. Niall Mor MacMhuirich has left a beautiful poem to this sentiment and, in this case, one with which he appears to have been personally involved. This poem is recorded here because it gives another insight into those Gaelic feasts and because it ably demonstrates that the sometimes austere and tradition-bound MacMhuirich professional bards were at once poets capable of lovely and moving verse.

Farewell for ever to last night;  
 swift though it passed, its joy remains:  
 though I were hanged for my share in it  
 I'd live it over tonight again.

There are two in this house tonight  
 whose eyes give their secrets away:  
 though they are not lip to lip  
 eager is the eye's play.

The eyes' swift glances must give all  
 the tale their prisoned lips would tell;  
 the eyes have kept no secret here,  
 lips' silence is of no avail.

Those who would make my true words false,  
 have sealed my lips, O languid eye;  
 but in your corner, out of reach,  
 understand what my eyes say:

"Keep the memory of this night,

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21. Matheson, op.cit., pp. lii-liii.

let there be no change till doom;  
do not let the morning in:  
throw out the cold day from the room.

Mother Mary, of fostering grace,  
since poets look to you for light,  
save me now, and take my hand -  
farewell for ever to last night. 22

In addition to these poetic duties, the MacMhuirichs also functioned as genealogists and historians to the Captains of the Clan Ranald. Genealogy, a necessity in a kin-based society, has ever been a passion of the Gaels and the study and preservation of history was tied closely into genealogical pursuits. About 1259, an Irish poet, Giolla Brighde Mhac Con Midhe, emphasised the close connection between history and genealogy.

Were poetry to be suppressed ... with no history,  
no ancient lays, save that each had a father,  
nothing of any man could be heard hereafter. 23

In this function as a historian one of the MacMhuirichs, probably Donald, the man who seems to have moved the kindred from Kintyre to South Uist and into the Clan Ranald fold, had some pointed words to say about the Lowland historian George Buchanan.

I hear that they talk about John Moydartach,  
and that Buchanan in particular does. But  
ask Sir George how he likes to speak about  
the princess to whom John Moydartach should  
show loyalty. But he who reviles the head  
is not wont to praise the limbs. 24

Later, Niall MacMhuirich composed his invaluable chronicle of the Montrose wars. Its significance can be seen throughout the above section on that topic. Unlike some historians, Niall was honest and straight-forward about his point of view when he said,

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22. Thomson, Introduction to Gaelic Poetry, op.cit., pp.52[53].  
23. Thomson, "Learned Orders", op.cit., p.71.  
24. Cameron, ed. (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.170.

"those who treated the affairs of the time have made no mention at all of the Gael, the men who did all the service".<sup>25</sup> Clearly, in an open way this MacMhuirich history as, indeed, most of the surviving Gaelic poetry, is favourably biased towards the traditional Gaelic world, but here it is felt that this honestly stated point of view is necessary to counter the obvious prejudice of contemporary Lowland material. When Niall MacMhuirich records that at Auldearn, on 9th May 1645,

The bold and warlike clan of the MacDonalds and of the truly fierce, very brave, powerfully spirited band of the Clanranald, forced the enemy manfully and bravely without the fear or terror of strokes or shots 26

he is not being any more biased than the compiler of the Records of the Privy Council of Scotland when in 1606 he condemns the

barbarous and detestable murthouris, slaughteris, and utheris insolenceis committit be the wicked and rebellious thevis and lym-mairis of the Lewis. 27

In fact, Niall MacMhuirich seems to be somewhat less guilty because he has put himself on record as being consciously trying to counter the existing bias of such Lowland sources. The need was certainly there and Niall was remarkably successful in achieving his goal.

Along with these bardic duties the MacMhuirich family performed a variety of other roles for the Clan Ranald. As has been seen, two of this kindred served as successive bailies of Benbecula<sup>28</sup> in the 17th century and a certain "Donald Gaire McMurich" obtained a wadset on 1st March 1633 and it was payed out and thus terminated

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25. Ibid., p.177.

26. Ibid., p.191.

27. R.P.C., op.cit., 1604-1607, p.204.

28. See above, pp.213-14.



on 8th April 1665.<sup>29</sup> This Donald Gearr may well have been Donald the bailie, the dates seem reasonable for that assumption; certainly this MacMhuirich was a man of note; on the discharge of the wadset he signed his name in classical Gaelic script.

On occasion a MacMhuirich bard would serve in other functions for the Clan Ranald and Cathall MacMhuirich is a well documented example. At least eleven of his poems survive<sup>30</sup> to testify to his importance as a bardic poet; and he was also a quite capable scribe and servitor who seems to have attended the Captain of Clan Ranald on occasion. But he was, in general, as a scribe and servitor, tied much more closely into service with the Benbecula branch of the kindred. In addition to being a noted poet and scholar in classical Gaelic, Cathal was also accomplished in other areas. Judging from surviving charters that were written by him, he had an excellent grasp of Scots and Latin.<sup>31</sup> It is useful to note for whom Cathal acted as a servitor because it has been generally assumed that the MacMhuirichs primarily functioned for the Captains of Clan Ranald;<sup>32</sup> if the surviving documentation gives a fair picture, this was not the case. While Cathal did on rare occasions act as scribe for the Captain of Clan Ranald, much more often he served as scribe, servitor and "actornay" for Ranald MacDonald of Castle Borge, head of the Benbecula family.

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29. GD201/1/84.

30. Thomson, "Bardic Family", op.cit., p.298.

31. GD201/1/23,29,40A & 43 and RS37/5/186.

32. See Thomson, "Bardic Family", op.cit., p.298. When Mr. Thomson describes Cathal as "servitor to Clanranald", either he was able to see manuscripts that have been lost from the Clan Ranald Papers, or, more likely, he saw one of those mentioned in the above paragraph and mistook the MacDonalds of Benbecula, whom Cathal was clearly serving, for the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald whom he rarely served as servitor.

True, in one document "Cathelus Mcmurichie" appears in a manuscript where only the business of John Moydartach and a "Rorie McCloid" of Talisker was involved<sup>33</sup> and in another case he appears with both John Moydartach and Ranald of Castle Borge.<sup>34</sup> But in the majority of the surviving charters, Cathal is clearly active as Ranald of Castle Borge's man. In 1634 Ranald describes him as "Catill Mc Murich, my servitor"<sup>35</sup> and in still another manuscript Cathal describes himself as "actornay" and servitor to "Rannald mc allane vc eane of Castlevorve".<sup>36</sup>

There is little evidence concerning the MacMhuirichs in Clan Ranald service before Cathal, but two items are of some interest. In a sasine of 21st July 1625, two servitors are mentioned and this document supports the above observation that for this early 17th century period the MacMhuirichs tended to serve the neighbouring Benbecula family and others often functioned for the Captain of Clan Ranald. In this charter Neill MacEachen is described as "srivitor to Johne McRannald of Moydart [John Moydartach] captain of clan-ronnald" and "Joane McWirrich" is "servitore to the sd. Ronald McRonald of Castell Worff";<sup>37</sup> of course, there were at least two separate and substantial families of MacMhuirichs in South Uist, one centred in Stilligarry and the other in Drimsdale. The other early mention of a MacMhuirich in a Clan Ranald charter occurs in a sasine dated 26th May 1633 in which John Moydartach grants certain

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33. GD201/1/23.

34. GD201/1/43.

35. GD201/1/40A.

36. GD201/1/29.

37. RS37/3/127.

lands in South Uist to his wife, Mor MacLeod. "Donald gorm McWirrich" is listed as a witness and is simply described as being "in dreamisdill".<sup>38</sup>

In the second half of the 17th century there still seems to be few MacMhuirichs, if any, serving a chief of the kindred in any specific role other than bard. This statement must be hedged with uncertainty because one individual, Maurice MacMhuirich, was notable in that he appeared on many documents concerning Donald of Clan Ranald and by 1702 he was certainly attending Donald's son, Allan, as servitor. Maurice appears as "witness" on a number of documents from 1662 to 1703,<sup>39</sup> but in a manuscript originally drawn up on 2nd December 1702 (before the 1703 discharge where Maurice was simply labelled "witness"), he signs as "Maurice Mcurich servitor to the said Allan McDonald of Mudiort".<sup>40</sup> And in 1707 he again appears, this time as "Maurice MacMurrach servant to Moydart".<sup>41</sup>

The only other late 17th century MacMhuirich to appear on Clan Ranald documents are Neill who appeared as a witness on a discharge of 27th August 1684 along with Neill Beaton, and while Neill and several other Beatons were acting as servitors to Clan Ranald in this period, both Neill MacMhuirich and Neill Beaton were here simply described as "indwellers in Uist".<sup>42</sup> And, finally, concerning 17th century MacMhuirich servitors, an interesting item occurs in a sasine of 22nd March 1681; among the witnesses are listed "Jacobo McDonald de Ballfinla, Joanne Mc urich ejus [his]

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38. Box 2, 26th May 1633, MacLeod of MacLeod Papers.

39. For example, see GD201/1/76 (1662); GD201/1/84 (1665); RS3/47/242 (1682) and GD201/3/60 (1703).

40. RS3/82/270.

41. FFEP, 1715, Moidart, Box 140, 1707.

42. MacLeod of MacLeod, Box 16, 153.



servitore".<sup>43</sup> This duin-uasal family was descended from Ranald MacDonald of Benbecula<sup>44</sup> and it supplied several bailies and chamberlains to South Uist.<sup>45</sup> As late as 1698 John MacMhuirich was still in Belfinlay attending that family.<sup>46</sup>

In the 18th century this bardic kindred continued to occupy positions of importance and trust in the Clan Ranald. The most significant member probably was Donald MacMhuirich of Stilligarry, the bard, but others such as the above mentioned Maurice were also in active service to the leading elements of the kindred. With the exception of Cathal MacMhuirich, the bard seldom appeared on documentation as scribe or servitor and, consequently, is difficult to trace. There is the occasional interesting possibility in the 17th century such as the 1637 mention of Donald Gorm MacMhuirich in Drimsdale and Neill the indweller in Uist in 1670, but while the names and dates justify interest, the sketchy documentation makes further inquiry difficult or impossible. As will be seen, in the 18th century similar situations exist, but in these cases it is possible to show that despite the same name and period, the servitor was not the contemporary bard.

There is, however, one example of a bard appearing on a sasine as a witness and this is a useful reference. In this agreement of 11th January 1706 between Allan MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald, and a Hector MacKinnon in North Uist, the following appears:

"Donaldi MacCurrich filio [son of] Nigelli McCurrick" in Stilligarry in Uist.<sup>47</sup>

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43. RS3/49/158.

44. See GD201/5/1233/2/p.34; GD201/1/167 and GD201/5/10/703.

45. RS3/73/359.

46. RS3/85/96.

47. RS3/90/301.

This is interesting in several ways. Firstly, since it is known that Donald of Stilligarry was the bard to Clan Ranald,<sup>48</sup> the reference shows that this bard was the son of a Niall, almost certainly the Niall who wrote the Montrose section in the "Book of Clan Ranald". Secondly, it seems to tie Niall to the Stilligarry holding and, finally, it demonstrates that Donald held Stilligarry, possibly with his father, before the 1707 tack, but on unknown terms.

Donald the bard is known to have been in possession of this land for several years. In the Judicial Rental of 1718 he reiterated the terms of his tack and deponed that

his prediceffors & himself had [Stilligarry]  
from the family of Clanranald for Registring  
the Deeds & Genealogie of the family & making  
panegyricks & C when Desyred. 49

In 1732 Donald was still occupying that holding because on 12th May of that year on a bond between Ranald MacDonald of Clan Ranald and his brother Alexander of Boisdale at Stilligarry he indentified himself as "Donald McMuirich tacksman of Staoligiarie".<sup>50</sup>

There is another Donald MacMhuirich who figures prominently in Clan Ranald documentation contemporary with Donald the bard. In several documents he was described as "Donald McMurich Servitor to me, the Said [Penelope] Lady Clanranald".<sup>51</sup> He was quite active in her service during the varied negotiations in which Lady Clanranald helped to recover the estate after the forfeiture of 1715.<sup>52</sup> During this period he made a number of trips to Edinburgh on behalf of Penelope of Clan Ranald to her Edinburgh kinsmen and lawyers, the

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48. GD201/2/4.

49. GD201/5/1257/5/ 105.

50. GD201/2/222.

51. MS 1309/9 and GD201/5/981.

52. MS 1303/25 May 1723; MS 1304/9, 47, 107, 144 & 152 and GD201/5/981.

MacKenzies of Delvine,<sup>53</sup> but he certainly was not Donald the bard of Stilligarry. Three times Donald, the servitor to Lady Penelope, signed as a witness for himself "Donald McMurich indweller in Dremstill".<sup>54</sup>

Other MacMhuirichs were active in Clan Ranald service in the first half of the 18th century but, again, none of them was the chief bard. In December 1715 a "Donald Mc Uurich" was included on a short list of prisoners following the rising of 1715 and was described as "Servant to the deceas'd Capt. of Clanronald".<sup>55</sup> In 1721 a "Donald MacWirrick" appeared twice as an attorney, once for Margaret MacLeod who was marrying Ranald, son of Donald MacDonald of Benbecula<sup>56</sup> and once for Ranald MacDonald of Milton in an agreement with Donald and Ranald MacDonald of Benbecula.<sup>57</sup> An instrument of sasine between Donald MacDonald of Benbecula and Alexander MacKenzie of Delvine dated 19th October 1727 was "Compeared personally" by "a discreet man Dougl'd McMurich in Ormadley [Ormiciate] in Uist as attorney" for younger and elder Benbecula.<sup>58</sup> A group of 1737-38

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53. MS 1304/47.

54. MS 1304/107 & 152 and GD201/1/221. Thomson's "Bardic Family", op.cit., p.301. There is a minor point in Mr. Thomson's article that appears to be in error. On this page he states that Donald the bard is on record as a tenant of Drimsdale in 1728 and as tacksman of Stilligarry in 1732. He appears to be using the Highland Society Report on Ossian of 1805 (MacKenzie, op.cit.) as his source, but that report only says that the MacMhuirichs held Drimsdale. This is true but from a close look at the Clan Ranald Papers it strongly appears that these are two different people. (See below, p.296, Donald the bard always described himself as of Stilligarry and in the Judicial Rental of 1718 he made no mention of holding any lands in Drimsdale and had he held such lands he would have mentioned that fact in the rental. (GD201/5/1257/5/105)).

55. RH2/4/308/365 & 421.

56. RS38/8/38.

57. RS38/8/37.

58. GD201/1/219.



receipts from South Uist and Benbecula is of interest as it lists the "officers" doing the collecting and this list of Outer Hebridean Clan Ranald officers is exactly what would be expected: four MacDonalds and "Nile duff, John Beatyn, Lauchd. McIntyre [and] Lauchl. McMurrich".<sup>59</sup> In 1742 an unspecified MacMhuirich was in service as a messenger between Ranald MacDonald younger of Clan Ranald and his Edinburgh lawyer, Roderick MacLeod.<sup>60</sup> And, finally, on 30th March 1753 Captain John Fergusson on a government sloop in the "west Isles" reported that those in the area were not cowed and that sixteen in the area, including a "Donald McMurrach" had gone off with a Jacobite agent to French service.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, the MacMhuirichs, as a relatively well fixed and well educated kindred in South Uist and Benbecula, were quite natural functionaries for their neighbours and immediate superiors, the MacDonalds of Benbecula, and for that same family when it became the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald.

While it is an appealing option to try and keep this study tidy and in this chapter simply describe the traditional Clan Ranald as in its remote potency, all aspects of the conservative culture intact, this would not be an accurate image. In the west Highlands the stresses and strains on the old culture came at a variety of times both to the various kindreds and to certain aspects of their shared Gaelic culture. The Campbell conquest of Mull and Morvern has been discussed<sup>62</sup> and the poem by Ruairi Morrison, the blind harper, that laments the deterioration of the Gaelic court at Dunvegan has been quoted<sup>63</sup> and in the Clan Ranald, too, the

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59. GD201/5/1219/1.

60. GD201/4/46.

61. RH2/4/377/47.

62. See above, pp.252-61.

63. See below, Appendix II, p.xliii.

stresses of the modern world were telling on the kindred and it is clearly seen in the bardic family of MacMhuirich well before the Rising of 1745 (the point at which so many authors either stop their discussion of the traditional Gaelic society and culture or where others so often start their discussion of the "modern" Highlands). Chapters and studies are artificial things, and while in some ways that Jacobite rebellion was significant, the deterioration of that traditional Gaelic world had started long before that event and, equally, traditional aspects were to linger long afterwards. One of the more significant markers in this Scottish Gaelic deterioration was the ebbing of the MacMhuirich bardic family within the Clan Ranald; much of that occurred before 1745.

As early as 1636 Cathal MacMhuirich suggested that serious problems existed with the system of bardic patronage:

Now that the Clanranald have left us  
learning cannot be followed by us;  
it is time for the ollave [senior poets] to follow them,  
his gifts will be hidden away. 64

It has been speculated that Cathal was here referring to the loss of several leading members of the kindred who had died in this year.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, this was a factor, but it has also been shown<sup>66</sup> that in this period John Moydartach, the Captain of Clan Ranald, faced large debts and that he was doing what he could to reduce expenditure and increase revenue; it is not unrealistic to speculate that he had somehow reduced the MacMhuirich support in his economy drive and was being scolded by Cathal. This seems reasonable because Cathal certainly was being over-pessimistic, as the continuing

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64. Thomson, Introduction to Gaelic Poetry, op.cit., p.41.

65. Ibid.

66. See above, p.202.

position of the MacMhuirich family for over 100 years shows.

Despite Cathal's over-reaction he was no doubt correct in identifying the start of a long but slow decline. His younger contemporary, Niall MacMhuirich, retained notable abilities as a bard but it has been observed that he was somewhat less skilled than his predecessors<sup>68</sup> and even his important section on the Montrose wars in the "Book of Clanranald" is defensive in nature. Moreover, in addition to writing in the literary dialect of the professional bard, he also wrote in 17th century vernacular Gaelic, a notable departure for a bard. Nevertheless, Niall wrote a considerable amount of useful material. In addition to the Montrose material previously discussed, he wrote a fine elegy in 1684 for Donald, son of John Moydartach. It is of interest purely as an example of a bardic elegy and because it openly discusses the perennial MacMhuirich fear that was slowly becoming real: the erosion of support that would endanger the bardic institutions.

Joy in the Hebrides has come to an end, the death  
of one man has brought entire affliction; though  
it is (but) the beginning of grief there is deep  
depression throughout the lands.

Since the death of the warrior of the blood of Conn,  
every heart is sick and wounded, others pay no  
respect to the clan, henceforth it will be easy to  
take their pledges (from them).

The son of big-bodied spirited John of Moidart  
[John Moydartach], the shortness of his life has  
wounded me sharply; wretched is my state now  
that this man is dead: that has consumed (as  
with fire) my flesh and my blood.

I never saw one like him for openness of disposition,  
for purity of character, for liberality, for excel-  
lence in (giving) goods and chattels - and the  
urbanity of our chief, alas, is in the clay.

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68. Thomson, "Bardic Family", op.cit., p.299.



He was the great nourisher and fosterer of our schools of poets; his death, O God, is a heavy loss for us; (the cutting short of) his life has stolen my strength from me; what are these but ill tidings (threatening) danger to the foundations (of our poetic institutions)? ...

In support of his king's great party, he bore arms from the time he came of age; he responded to the fury of the battle-fields, a steadfast, noble warrior, for such my beloved one was.

Hero that was most powerful in every battle-field, whose tenderness to the unfortunate was most pleasantly given; the heart of this one contained true love, lying in the ground is the beloved of men of learning ...

Many a man in fair Uist, and many a woman is in a paroxysm of grief, because their chief has been hidden in the clay: the guardian of warrior-bards who did not flee from a pursuing host.

Donald, while he was alive, never kept back from me anything that I asserted was due to me as a reward; in the gap of danger he was not weak, my white sun, he who did not hoard cattle. 69

And in one of Niall's two elegiac verses for Allan of Clanranald, who was killed in 1715, he reiterates his praise for the deceased chief and his fears for the future. Niall recalls Allan as a patron of the traditional arts who took an active interest in the playing of music and the composing of poems, the cherishing of every artistic practice.

and he goes on to predict that now the kindred will

for ever lack reciting from books  
the traditional learning of the Gael. 70

In this case the fear for the future was well founded. Bards were always somewhat defensive about their patronage, but it appears that in the 17th and early 18th centuries they felt especially insecure and on the death of every well disposed chief, the departed's generosity would habitually be praised while at the same time vague

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69. Ibid., pp.25-27.

70. Ibid., p.41.

allusions to the worrying future were made. All this, doubtless, with the ear and pocket of the new chief in mind; but it also should be borne in mind that the bards were justifiably concerned with the preservation of their ancient art as well as their personal positions of honour and their income. And when considering Niall's 1715 elegy for Allan, it cannot be overlooked that Allan had indeed been famous as a patron of the Gaelic arts and that after his death the MacMhuirich decline did accelerate.

Donald, the bard of Stilligarry, continued in possession of his lands and performed for the new chiefs of Clan Ranald, the MacDonalds of Benbecula, but this was a time of decline. Stilligarry was no longer held free in return for bardic services. Donald was to pay ten pounds Scots and public dues for his tack,<sup>71</sup> not a great sum, but certainly a notable change in the bardic status quo, and, more to the point, only a few "rather dull poems probably by Donald survive".<sup>72</sup> But this was not the case with Donald's replacement, his nephew Neill. In this individual the deterioration of MacMhuirich skills became pronounced.

One factor in the decline of the MacMhuirichs was the general fading of the traditional culture in the area. The ranks of fellow bards were thinning, those who survived were somewhat lack-lustre compared to their bardic predecessors. Some of the surviving bards were turning to vernacular poetry and a whole new and exciting generation of vernacular non-bardic poets was on the rise. At the same time the courts where the bards were supported were decreasing. And the opportunity to study at Irish bardic schools was rapidly

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71. GD201/2/4.

72. Thomson, "Bardic Family", op.cit., p.301.

disappearing as Ulster became ever more the barrier it was intended to be. The flagging traditional cultural milieu had an ever increasing drag-effect of its own.

In 1748 another Judicial Rental was taken and in it Neill MacMhuirich, the current Clan Ranald bard, described himself as "Choronologer and Poet Laureat to the Family of Clanronald". He still held the same two-penny lands in Stilligarry that his ancestors had held but without benefit of a written tack. His rent was set by oral agreement at sixty merks Scots, but he was "only lyable to pay Fifteen merks of the above [sixty merks] Rent yearly, being allowed the remainder of his Rent for his services to the family".<sup>73</sup>

Neill had only been trained in South Uist by his uncle, Donald. Neill could read and write classical Gaelic but Donald's labours bore little fruit; Neill seems to have added nothing to the MacMhuirich collection.<sup>74</sup> In the light of this, it may seem that Neill was being a bit grandiose in describing his functions as "Choronologer and Poet Laureat" for the Clan Ranald but this attitude appears to stem more from his irritation and hostility to the post-Culloden situation in which South Uist swarmed with troops and government agents. It was when facing the outsiders who took the Judicial Rental of 1748 that he made the above statement and in an appropriate and defiant manner he signed the Rental only in a bold classical Gaelic script, twice.

Two years before Neill had taken part in a tragic act of even greater hostility towards the future and those who brought it. After word of the disaster at Culloden Moor had reached South Uist, the

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73. Thomson, "Bardic Family", op.cit., p.301.

74. E744/1/pp.49-50.



MacMhuirichs are said to have destroyed old manuscripts "by the cartload" in order to prevent them from being taken by the troops.<sup>75</sup> What documents were destroyed? This does not sound like a random selection taken out of the chief's house, because troops did take a certain proportion of "Clan Ronald's Papers" from that house in the following weeks,<sup>76</sup> another group of papers were discovered in that residence in 1758<sup>77</sup> and in any case by this period that place of residence was in Benbecula, not South Uist. No, this substantial collection of papers had been under MacMhuirich care and there are interesting clues as to its content. Firstly, the words of the 1618 elegy for Donald MacAllan MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald, written by his wife Mairi MacDonald, come back. In it she mentions the use of books of history with red bindings.<sup>78</sup> To this early reference and the documented loss of "cart loads" of material after Culloden can be added the fact that the few surviving Gaelic Clan Ranald manuscripts can be identified as having been under MacMhuirich care in the pre-Culloden period.<sup>79</sup> This leads to the conclusion that the MacMhuirichs oversaw a good number of potentially important manuscripts such as genealogies, histories, old Gaelic sagas and more contemporary poetry. Most of this material has been lost.

One further point regarding the MacMhuirich bards in the Clan Ranald merits consideration. The few historians who have looked at them have quite rightly examined the individual bards and their

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75. Thomson, "Bardic Family", *op.cit.*, p.301.

76. MS 3733/137.

77. GD201/4/85.

78. Thomson, "Learned Orders", *op.cit.*, p.71.

79. See Henry MacKenzie, Report of the Highland Society on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian, (Edinburgh: University Press, 1805).

development artistically and materially within the Clan Ranald. The conditions and circumstances of these bards have been tied to the development, circumstance and attitude of the Clan Ranald and its leadership. This is as it should be, but, conversely, it is important to remember that when a Captain of Clan Ranald planted the MacMhuirichs in South Uist, he also planted a powerful and intensely conservative seed in the heart of his kindred. Not only did the Clan Ranald have its effect on the MacMhuirichs, but they had their own effect on the clan. Doubtless, the presence of the tradition-bound MacMhuirichs helped to hold the Clan Ranald to its conservative course and operated as a drag on any chief, such as John Moydartach, of the Montrose period, or Ranald MacDonald after 1746, who needed to move with the times and find new answers to new problems.

So when John Moydartach faced the great economic pressures of the early 17th century and when Ranald MacDonald faced the political and cultural crisis of the post-Culloden period they also confronted the entrenched MacMhuirich bards who (especially in the first instance) had the position, literary skills, inclination and temporal power to act as spokesmen for the old ways. However, this look at the MacMhuirichs would leave the wrong impression if it closed only with the discussion of this inbuilt friction between bards and chiefs; this friction only existed in periods of crisis. The final conclusion regarding these bards in the traditional period must be that the Clan Ranald, with notable devotion, valued and attempted to emulate and preserve the old traditions. In this the Captains of Clan Ranald and their MacMhuirich bards were not at cross purposes.

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The value placed on the old Gaelic ways in the Clan Ranald is manifest not only in the special place given over to the MacMhuirich family, but also to others who held clan offices. While the MacMhuirichs must hold pride-of-place both in the Clan Ranald and in a general Scottish Gaelic context, other families of hereditary Gaelic learned men were also significant. In the west Highlands and Islands in general and in the Clan Ranald in particular the Beatons, or MacBeths, come closest to rivalling the MacMhuirichs in terms of length, diversity and excellence of service,<sup>80</sup> and thus merit special attention. Here, it is felt that the close Beaton association with the Clan Ranald was no more a happy coincidence than was the clan's tie with the MacMhuirichs. The Beatons were the Gaelic world's most skilled physicians and in their own right they were noted Gaelic scholars and sometimes poets. Their ancient lineage, their close service with the Lords of the Isles, their excellent reputation and the prestige thereby offered, all combined to make the services of the Beatons attractive to the Captains of Clan Ranald. However, it must be added that the Beatons served many other kindreds and that their attachment to several of these other clans was of longer duration than their service to the Clan Ranald.

Traditionally, the Beatons are said to have descended from a physician who came to the Hebrides in the retinue of Agnes O'Kane, daughter of Conbuidh O Cathain, one of the most formidable barons of Ulster, about 1300.<sup>81</sup> The earliest known reference to this family in a medical context is in a 1379 grant of lands in Sutherland made

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80. Thomson, "Learned Orders", op.cit., p.61.

81. Ibid., and Donald MacDonald, Clan Donald, op.cit., p.61.



by Alexander Stewart, the Wolf of Badenoch, to Ferchar Lighiche.<sup>82</sup> In 1408 a Fergus MacBetha witnessed a Gaelic document granted by John of the Isles in Islay. As Fergus is the only witness, apart from the Lord of the Isles himself, to sign his name, it has been speculated that he was also the writer of the document. While this charter does not specify that he was a medical man, other evidence indicates that he was an ancestor, direct or collateral, of the medical MacBeths or Beatons of Islay.<sup>83</sup> As was seen above, "Beatton, the principal physician" and then MacMhuirich, the poet, were among the very few individuals who were given special places of honour at the Lord of the Isles' table at Aros Castle in Mull in the 15th century.<sup>84</sup>

For over two centuries the MacBeths, or Beatons, were prominent landholders in Islay. First, holding their lands from the Lords of the Isles, then from the MacDonalds of Islay and on the fall of that family to the Campbells of Cawdor. At that point, Fergus MacBeath, who then held the office of Chief Physician of the Isles, obtained a crown charter from James VI in 1609 of certain lands in Islay in his official capacity as "principalis medici intra bondus insularim" (chief physician within the bounds of the Isles).<sup>85</sup> His son, John MacBeath, succeeded to these lands in 1628, but the following year gave them over to the Thane of Cawdor. With this transaction the Islay medical family disappeared from documentary evidence.

In the 17th century members of the Beaton family settled in a number of west Highland and Island kindreds. It is also likely

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82. Thomson, "Learned Orders", op.cit., p.61.

83. Ibid.

84. Hugh MacDonald, "History", op.cit., p.45.

85. GD50/224/24.

that, since medical men were always needed, Beatons had earlier served various area kindreds, but given the present state of research, this remains speculation. What is known is that by the mid to late 17th century Beaton physicians served the MacDonalds of Sleat,<sup>86</sup> Glengarry,<sup>87</sup> the Clan Ranald, the Clan MacLean<sup>88</sup> and, interestingly, the Frasers of Lovat.<sup>89</sup>

The first documented case of a Beaton medical man serving the Clan Ranald occurs in 1684. In two bonds of that year, dated 22nd January and 13th February, drawn up in the Isle of Canna, "Fergus Beaton Chyrurgeon in Cana" appeared as a witness.<sup>90</sup> Later, on 9th April 1700, this same Fergus appeared on an assignation as a witness describing himself "ffergus Beaton doctor of Phisick in South Wist".<sup>91</sup> It seems that in 1684 Fergus held hereditary lands in Canna and practised elsewhere. Finally, in the same general period one other Beaton physician appears to have been practising on the periphery of the Clan Ranald mainland holdings, probably serving the MacDonnells of Glengarry; he appears in the Argyll Sheriff Court Records in 1718 described as "Aeneas Beaton Cherurgon in Knodart".<sup>92</sup>

Martin Martin in 1695 stated that Fergus Beaton, the physician of South Uist, was still in possession of a traditional medical library in manuscript form. Martin stated:

Fergus Beaton hath the following ancient Irish manuscripts in the Irish character: to wit,

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86. GD201/3/6, 12 & 14.

87. SC29/55/4/p.184 and MS 1313/34 (as a servitor to Lady Glengarry).

88. Wodrow, op.cit., p.124 and MacLeod Papers, Box 14c, 1633 (as a servitor to MacLean of Duart).

89. GD201/1/160.

90. GD201/1/143 and FFEP, 1715, Box 140, 13 Feb. 1684.

91. GD201/1/169.

92. SC29/55/4/p.184.

Acicenna, Averroes, Joannes de Vigo, Bernardus  
Gordonus, and several volumes of Hippocrates. 93

A good deal of general information about the Hebridean Beaton physicians is given in a statement by John MacLean in 1702. In it he was referring specifically to the Islay and Mull Beatons, but these general observations certainly give insights into the Clan Ranald Beatons.

Our Physicians were Beattons both in Mull and Islay, of whose skill and acts they talk great things. They were expert schollars both in Irish and Latine, but had English ne'er a word. They had heritable right to so much land while they could so much as draw blood, which they yet enjoy. 94

In the 17th century Edward Lhuyd, Keeper of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, traced the Rev. John Beaton to Ireland. To this episcopalian minister, the last classical Gaelic scholar of the Beaton family, had "fallen all their books and manuscripts".<sup>95</sup> In Beaton's impressive Gaelic library, among numerous other documents, Lhuyd found the earliest account of the fall of Troy translated into any European language other than Latin, anthologies of Irish verse, a good selection of Irish sagas and romances, historical works, genealogical tracts, some pages of parchment concerning ancient Irish law and, of course, a number of medical treatises, some of certain Greek and Arabic origin.<sup>96</sup>

It is strange that the references to Beaton medical men in the Clan Ranald only occur in the limited period mentioned above. Before this late 17th century period no record of any medical

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93. Martin, op.cit., p.155.

94. Woodrow, op.cit., p.124.

95. Ibid.

96. John Lorne Campbell and Derick Thomson, "Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands, 1699-1700", T.G.S.I., 1963, pp.37-46.



man has been uncovered for this kindred. In the later period, however, this is not the case. As early as 1718 Donald MacDonald was active and describing himself "chirurgion in South Uist",<sup>97</sup> and was practising in that Isle at least as late as 1738.<sup>98</sup> In 1732 his two sons, Allan and Ranald, received special mention as being "good, generous" and capable in the Records of the Synod of Glenelg and were recommended "fitt" to be educated at Reinings School in Inverness.<sup>99</sup> It is noteworthy that the doctor and his family were presbyterians, the two boys certainly profiting from the kirk's policy of supporting the area's few non-catholics. In Donald MacDonald it is possible to see the beginnings of a change-over from the traditional medical practices of the Beaton's to more modern training and methods. This surgeon, whose father had also practised medicine, was not educated in the old way, but had served an apprenticeship under an apothecary.

In 1741 Alexander MacEachen was functioning as a "chyrurgeon in Arasaig"<sup>100</sup> and John MacDonald, the brother of Kinlochmoidart, was doing the same in Moidart.<sup>101</sup> Finally, in a 1744 trial, another Clan Ranald medical man appeared as a witness, described as "John McVarish Chyrurgeon in Moydart".<sup>102</sup>

Through their period of service to the Lords of the Isles and in the centuries following, many Beaton's, like the MacMhuirichs, served in posts outside their basic occupation. As an important Hebridean learned family, the Beaton's supplied more than doctors, in

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97. GD201/1/205.

98. GD201/5/1236/11.

99. CH2/568/1/p.100.

100. RS38/9/282.

101. E764/1/p.7.

102. CH2/273/pp.84-90.

the same way the MacMhuirichs supplied more than bards. But, unlike these poets, the Beatons operated in a general west Highland and Hebridean sphere, supplying scribes and servitors to a number of area kindreds.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, on occasion, the Beatons also served as bards to the MacLeans of Duart.<sup>104</sup>

In the Clan Ranald the Beatons were active in functions other than that of physician. The earliest mention of a Beaton connected with the Clan Ranald discovered in this search is of John Beaton, or as he appears in the "Book of Clan Ranald", "Eoin mac Domnuill Faghlach meig bethadh" or "John son of Donald of Benbecula Beaton".<sup>105</sup> This man was listed along with several MacDonalds and two MacMhuirichs as Donald of Clan Ranald's daoin-uaisle who in 1648 had served with him in Ireland. The next reference to a Beaton in a Clan Ranald context occurs on a sasine dated 1st September 1670 in which Donald Beaton in Uist appears as a witness.<sup>106</sup> By the middle of the next decade at least four Beatons are serving Donald MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald. In January 1684 the witnesses to a discharge between Donald of Clan Ranald and John MacLeod of Talisker are listed as "ffergus, Neill, Donald & Neill Beattons servitors to the sd. Donald Mc donald".<sup>107</sup> Of course, this does not imply that these Beatons could not also be medical men; indeed, Fergus was a physician. In a variety of other documents from this period these same individuals appear either separately or in pairs as witnesses and were always

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103. For example, see MS 1313/34 and MacLeod of MacLeod Papers, Box 14C, 1633.

104. MS 2133/p.335-39 Donald Gregory's notes.

105. Cameron, ed. (Book of Clan Ranald), op.cit., Vol.II, p.206.

106. RS38/4/51.

107. GD201/1/142.

described as servitors to the Captain of Clan Ranald.<sup>108</sup> In 1737, when the Clan Ranald was no longer served by Beaton physicians, John Beaton was serving as a ground officer in South Uist.<sup>109</sup> Ruairi Beaton was the charge keeper in Stonybridge, South Uist in 1749<sup>110</sup> and John Beaton was messenger for Ranald MacDonald of the Clan Ranald in 1753.<sup>111</sup>

The Beatons were obviously a notable force within the Clan Ranald and throughout the west Highlands and Isles. One surprising aspect of this inquiry has been the relatively late appearance of the Beatons in Clan Ranald documentation. Some Beatons were living among the Clan Ranald at least as early as 1648 and Fergus of Canna was plying his medical arts by 1684, but this evidence, while inconclusive, suggests a somewhat late movement of Beaton physicians and learned men into the Clan Ranald. But if the Beatons did move under Clan Ranald protection relatively late, they seem to have moved in force because by the mid 1680's the Beaton establishment within the leading ranks of the Clan Ranald appears to have come close to rivalling that of the MacMhuirichs.

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The other family of hereditary Clan Ranald professionals that can be identified with documentary certainty are the MacIntyre pipers whom tradition places in Clan Ranald service quite early,<sup>112</sup>

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108. For example, see RS3/49/158 (Fergus & Neill, 1683) and FFEP, 1715/Box 140 (Neill & Donald, 1682).

109. GD201/5/1219/1.

110. MS 1306/85.

111. GD201/5/77.

112. GD50/225/5.



but who can be tied to the kindred with manuscript evidence only in the mid 18th century. Despite the relatively late nature of the documentation, the combination of traditional evidence, documentary material and the physical evidence of an old set of MacIntyre pipes that were left with the MacDonalds of Kinlochmoidart, all unite to make an acceptable case for a long MacIntyre presence in the Clan Ranald.

These Clan Ranald pipers are a branch of the MacIntyres of Rannoch who were the hereditary pipers to the Chiefs of Clan Menzies. There is a tradition in the Clan Menzies that their MacIntyre pipers played before them in 1314 at the Battle of Bannockburn.<sup>113</sup> Certainly, there are several specific contemporary references to bagpipes in John Barbour's "The Bruce"<sup>114</sup> and in other sources of that period.<sup>115</sup>

In the Clan Ranald, pipers are referred to as early as the 1618 elegy to Sir Donald MacAllan, Captain of Clan Ranald, composed by his widow Mairi.<sup>116</sup> As the tradition is that the MacIntyres were hereditary pipers to Clan Ranald,<sup>117</sup> as their kin in Rannoch were certainly functioning long before this time and as MacIntyres are on record later, in a better documented period, as an established hereditary piping family in the Clan Ranald, it is possible that

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113. Francis Collinson, The Bagpipe, the History of a Musical Instrument, (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.132. It is strange that Mr. Collinson, in this useful book, ignores or is ignorant of the entire MacIntyre connection with the Clan Ranald, except for one indirect mention of the MacIntyres leaving an old set of pipes with the MacDonalds of Kinlochmoidart.

114. Ibid., p.126.

115. Ibid.

116. Thomson, "Learned Orders", op.cit., p.71.

117. GD50/225/5.

MacIntyres were serving the kindred as early as 1618. But all that can be stated with certainty is that by the mid 18th century they were well established within the Clan Ranald.

In the 18th century the evidence is strong to suggest that the MacIntyres were established in Benbecula near the chief's residence, but that the kindred was also served by at least one piper on the mainland who was not a MacIntyre. This man was a MacKinnon and possibly served MacDonald of Kinlochmoidart. This state of affairs with at least one piper on the mainland and one in the Outer Isles was not unusual in that period; it is known that MacLeod of Dunvegan employed three pipers, one for each section of his estate.<sup>118</sup>

The first reference occurs in 1738 on a list of the people of Benbecula who were sworn for the "extirpation" of theft. On this list appears "John the Piper".<sup>119</sup> Unfortunately, John is the only person on the list not described by his full name. Doubtless, John the Piper was sufficient identification in Benbecula in 1738 but it leaves the 20th century historian to rely on the tradition that the MacIntyre pipers were "long in Rannoch and Benbecula",<sup>120</sup> that there were several other MacIntyres in Benbecula on that same list<sup>121</sup> and that Lauchlan MacIntyre was serving as a ground officer in Benbecula in 1737.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, the piobaireachd "My King has landed at Moidart", inspired by the landing of Prince Charles Edward Stuart in

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118. Isabel Frances Grant, The MacLeods; the History of a Clan, 1200 - 1956, (London: 1959), pp.165, 489-91.

119. GD201/1/351/4.

120. Dr. Alaster MacLean, related this and other pieces of South Uist and Benbecula oral traditions during two hospitable visits in August of 1977 at his home in Lochboisdale, South Uist.

121. GD201/1/351/4.

122. GD201/5/1219/1.

Moidart in 1745, is attributed to a John MacIntyre. One study has stated that this John MacIntyre was "one of the piping family of MacIntyres from Rannoch",<sup>123</sup> but does not document this statement. For several reasons this seems curious. Firstly, the MacIntyre pipers in Rannoch were serving the Chief of Clan Menzies, Robert Menzies of Culdares, and despite the fact that some of his followers were active Jacobites, the chief remained inactive. Furthermore, it is specifically known that the MacIntyres of Glend<sup>y</sup> and Rannoch were quiet during that rebellion.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, the Clan Ranald was quite active during that campaign; the Prince landed in Moidart on Clan Ranald territory and the piobaireachd is said to have been composed immediately upon his arrival there.<sup>125</sup> So, "John the Piper" of Benbecula could well have been the composer of that piobaireachd because he was almost certainly "John 'MacIntyre' the piper" and as Clan Ranald's piper he would likely have been present in Moidart with Ranald, younger of the Clan Ranald, when the Prince came ashore; as Clanranald's piper he would have been far more likely than any Rannoch piper to compose a piobaireachd to celebrate that event. The second Clan Ranald piper in this period, the man who lived in Arisaig, appeared at a Baron Bailie Court in 1739 and was described as "John McKinnon Pyper".<sup>126</sup>

The next Clan Ranald piper was "Duncan McIntyre Piper to Clan-ranald". He appears on a variety of charters around 1760 as a witness.<sup>127</sup> These references to Duncan MacIntyre are interesting

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123. Collinson, op.cit., p.167.

124. MS 3735/313.

125. Collinson, op.cit., p.167.

126. GD201/1/227A.

127. GD201/1/257 (1760); GD201/5/102 & 1148 (both in 1760).



not only because they testify to a continuing MacIntyre service in the Clan Ranald, but also because, despite the existence of the Disarming Act in which weapons, Highland dress and bagpipes were outlawed from 1747 to 1782, Duncan not only continued to serve as a piper to Ranald MacDonald, younger of Clan Ranald, but also he openly described himself as "Piper to Clanranald" in public documents. One explanation may lie in the fact that Duncan, like his MacIntyre forebears, continued to reside in the remote Benbecula; at least, most documents on which he appears as a witness were signed at Nunton in Benbecula.

The MacIntyre pipers of Rannoch and Benbecula attended the piping college in Skye of the MacCrimmons, master pipers and musicians to the MacLeods of Dunvegan. Along with other hereditary piping families such as the MacArthurs who served the MacDonalds of Sleat and the Rankins who were hereditary pipers to the MacLeans of Duart and Coll and the Stewarts of Appin, the MacIntyres underwent long periods of tuition in the art of piping at the MacCrimmon school at Borreraig near Dunvegan. Seven years seems to have been the basic term of study, but at spaced intervals it could stretch to as many as twelve.<sup>128</sup> The last students on record at the MacCrimmon college were Clan Ranald's MacIntyre pipers.<sup>129</sup>

The next MacIntyre piper who appears in Clan Ranald employment, Robert MacIntyre, is surrounded with confusion. It is not certain if he stemmed from the Rannoch or the Benbecula branch of the family, but he certainly seems to have brought the most treasured MacIntyre possession out of Rannoch to his Clan Ranald home. This was the

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128. Collinson, op.cit., p.155.

129. GD50/225/5.

single-drone set of "Bannochburn pipes". Two sources state that when he emigrated to America in 1790 he left this old set of pipes with the MacDonalds of Kinlochmoidart.<sup>130</sup> Traditionally, these were the pipes played by the MacIntyres before the Battle of Bannockburn. There is a foundation at least to aspects of this story because this old set of pipes still exists.<sup>131</sup> However, Dr. John Lorne Campbell of Canna points out that the tale of the gift of the pipes by a Robert MacIntyre to the MacDonalds of Kinlochmoidart in 1790 is at odds with the chronology and states that this could not have occurred before 1799.<sup>132</sup> What can be stated with certainty is that the pipes exist and are quite old; and that the story of when they came into the possession of the Kinlochmoidart family is confused.

This inquiry has uncovered two pieces of information that help to relieve this uncertainty by showing that Robert MacIntyre could not have emigrated before 1804 (well within Dr. Campbell's chronological restrictions) or that there were two Robert MacIntyre pipers and that one emigrated as first alleged in 1790, but that the second remained in Clan Ranald service until 1804. This is not so far-fetched because in conservative Gaelic families, and certainly the MacIntyres were one, traditional names were likely to be retained from generation to generation and, often in an extended area kindred, would recur frequently in each generation.

On 14th March 1800 at a meeting of the Tutors, or overseers, of the young Reginald George of Clan Ranald, a letter from "Robert MacIntyre Piper to the late Clanranald, and now servant to Mr. McNiel

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130. Collinson, op.cit., p.133 and GD50/225/5.

131. Collinson, op.cit., p.133.

132. Ibid.

of Barra" stated that Robert wanted to treat for a farm either in Arisaig or Benbecula.<sup>133</sup> The Tutors were told that "Mr. McIntyre has always been considered as a sober industrious man" and instructed the factor, Robert Brown, to consult with him. In 1804 it is seen that he was able to maintain his connection with the Clan Ranald and remained a piper because he appears on a list of debts of the Clan Ranald family and was referred to as "Robert McIntyre piper".<sup>134</sup>

As late as 1823 Reginald George MacDonald of Clan Ranald was maintaining a piper in the west Highlands, but no longer a MacIntyre. In this period Clan Ranald's piper was Donald MacKay. While the MacIntyre chain had been broken the MacKays had a proud heritage of their own as hereditary pipers to the MacKenzies of Gairloch and MacLeods of Raasay.<sup>135</sup> This 1823 reference to a piper to Clan Ranald is, of course, quite late in a chapter on a traditional kindred and leads to a useful conclusion. The chief might (and usually did) lose the language of his ancestors and tenants in the late 18th or early 19th century, and thus cease to appreciate the poetry of the bards, he might turn to university trained physicians, use Edinburgh lawyers and other Lowlanders as factors, but more than any other clan professional the piper retained his place, music speaking to people of all classes and backgrounds, the pipes and pipers kept their special romantic place, bridging the gap between the remote traditional Clan Ranald of Sir Donald MacAllan in the early 17th century to the sad deterioration of Reginald George who played at the role of "clan chief" as a sort of well-meant hobby in the mid 19th

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133. GD201/5/1233/35/p.6.

134. GD201/5/1215/8.

135. Collinson, op.cit., p.156.



century.

There is one other interesting point concerning piping in the Clan Ranald; while this music was doubtless an old and valued aspect of the traditional culture, there were significant individuals within the leading ranks of the Clan Ranald who did not find the sound of the pipes pleasing. These were the bards. The traditional accompaniment of the professional Highland poet had been the clarsach, or harp, and in the 17th and early 18th centuries, along with other stresses on the older aspects of the culture, the piper was tending to replace the bard's old ally, the harpist. The bards found this both disquieting and irritating. In a mid 17th century poem, Niall MacMhuirich, the author of the Montrose section of the "Book of Clan Ranald", makes his feelings on the pipers in general and on John and Donald MacArthur, pipers to MacDonald of Sleat, in particular, clear. Niall MacMhuirich sang "The History of the Piper's Pedigree from the Beginning":

An overblown pig's bladder, grunt, grunt!  
The (pipe's) first bag which was not sweet,  
came from the beginning of the Flood. ...

A while after that, a crude invention was  
extended and three pipes grew on the bagpipe,  
one of them long, trailing and unwieldy,  
with a harsh deep buzzing sound.

When the buzzing had been brought under control  
and the reed entirely, the contraption  
spread like that, squealing and grunting.

John MacArthur's screeching bagpipe is like  
a diseased heron, full of spittle, long  
limbed and noisy, with an infected chest like  
that of a grey curlew.

Of the world's music Donald's pipe is a broken  
down outfit, offensive to a multitude,  
sending forth its slaver through its rotten bag;  
it was a most disgusting filthy deluge. 136

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136. Collinson, op.cit., p.185.

From a letter dated 8th July 1702 it is known that the Clan Ranald was served by a harpist fairly late. The writer of this letter, Farquhar MacCulloch, servitor to Allan MacDonald of Clan Ranald, closed the communication with the MacKenzies of Delvine by saying, "I have drunke Neill Baine Harper drinking your health sua that he is not able to tune the harpe".<sup>137</sup> It is unfortunate that MacCulloch, clearly quite familiar with the harper, did not include his surname. However, it is interesting that he felt the MacKenzies of Delvine also knew Neill well enough to use such familiar language. This supports what a knowledge of Allan's Gaelic court would suggest, that a harpist was a normal fixture in Allan's establishment. What is certain is that the service of the MacMhuirichs make the long-term presence of a harpist in the Clan Ranald likely and that this mention of "Neill Baine harper" is relatively late for a west Highland harpist.<sup>138</sup>

There was a variety of other individuals, often MacDonalds, who served the Clan Ranald in functions such as servitor, chamberlain and scribe, but with most of these there is a lack of any useful pattern or hereditary position and, consequently, a great deal of space has not been devoted to them. The above Farquhar MacCulloch is a good example of these individuals. He served the Clan Ranald from as early as 1682 until well into the 18th century. MacCulloch also did occasional work for the Camerons of Locheil, Donald MacKay in Inverness, MacDonald of Morar and John Beaton, "Chirurgion in Slait".<sup>139</sup> While MacCulloch served both the Clan

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137. MS 1105/143.

138. Thomson, "Learned Orders", op.cit., p.70.

139. See GD201/5/941; RS3/49/158 and RD2(Mack)/87/63.

Ranald and outsiders, others just served within the kindred. The only other group of special note in the Clan Ranald were the MacDonalds of Belfinlay. This duin-uasal class family descended from the Benbecula branch and served as bailies, chamberlains and factors from the mid 17th century until the early 19th century.<sup>140</sup>

The deteriorating position of the Clan Ranald's professional families was one of the most significant markers of change in the 18th century. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries these once proud Clan Ranald duin-uasal families found themselves in vastly reduced circumstances. As their professional standing deteriorated, as differences between landholders and commoners increased, the MacMhuirichs (or Curries as they often came to be called), Beatons and MacIntyres remained on the old Clan Ranald's lands but more often than not as commoners, holding no more than other small tenants, their families retaining only the memories of what had been.

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140. GD201/1/51, GD201/1/167 and GD201/5/217.



## CHAPTER VI

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Once the old structure of the Lordship and the internal stability thereby created had passed into history, a numerous and loyal following became even more important to a Highland chief. This following was drawn primarily from the members of the kindred below the duin-uasal class. It is to this important group, the bulk of the kindred, this study must now turn.

A traditional clan depended on its leadership for survival, and that leadership, consisting of chief and daoine-uaisle, depended on their followers, the clansmen. Their inter-relationship is central to a comprehension of the traditional culture. Classes there were in old Gaelic society. Certainly a highly refined hierarchy existed in the Clan Ranald. But it is an all too common error to equate the class system of the 19th and 20th centuries with traditional Gaeldom. In Highland society of the traditional period, as it had evolved by the early 17th century, all members of a Highland clan were tied together in a complex union based on kinship (in many cases), mutual need (in all cases) and a striking cultural cohesion that was tied to an ancient, proud, shared and extremely conservative tradition.

The 1520 deposition of Dugall MacRanald is an excellent early example of this inter-relationship between the ranks of the clan. When Dugall failed in his duties as an overseer of the people of the Clan Ranald, he was deposed. His elected replacement, and that man's descendants, received indispensable support from all ranks of the kindred in their long but successful struggle to maintain them-

themselves and their kindred's right to depose a poor chief and select a new one. In the 18th century when asked the value of his estate, MacDonnell of Keppoch proudly informed the English questioner that his rentroll consisted of 500 fighting men. To this traditional chief a numerous following of loyal kinsmen was more important than a high money rent. In making this boast, Alexander MacDonnell was testifying to the continuation of that important inter-relationship between Highland chief and Highland clansman.

This study of the Clan Ranald has chronicled the continuing existence of and need for this interdependence between classes. From the long period in the 16th century when John Moydartach and those who elected his line, the peoples of the Clan Ranald, held their inheritance by the sword, through the Linn nan Creach, the Civil War period and to the start of the Jacobite era at Killiecrankie this examination of the Clan Ranald has marked the existence of these inter-class ties. No chief could hold his lands by the sword without the support of a loyal and tightly-knit martial kindred. For exceptionally long periods the Clan Ranald did this and as will be seen in the following pages the Clan Ranald maintained this kin-based fighting organisation a number of years after Culloden.

It is a mistake to assume that Highland people were attached to their chief's cause because of coercion or lack of imagination. A Gaelic kindred was not a pack of clannish sheep. In the early era, the deposition of Dugall MacRanald in the Clan Ranald and the several other cases of deposed west Highland chiefs, and one Lord of the Isles, shows this; and there is a mass of other evidence to illustrate the same point. From the later period, the Rising of

1745-46 provides a variety of such material.<sup>1</sup> Here, two examples from the Clan Ranald will suffice.

In 1745 Alexander MacDonald of Boisdale, the brother of the elder Captain of Clan Ranald, felt the rising was hopeless and, consequently, he used all his influence and power in South Uist and Benbecula to hold the inhabitants of those islands out of the Clan Ranald regiment despite their certain Jacobite passions. As will be seen,<sup>2</sup> Alexander of Boisdale was actually forced to employ violent tactics to try to prevent these Clan Ranald men from joining the Jacobites; on the other hand, there is no evidence<sup>3</sup> that the chiefs of the Clan Ranald ever forced their people into any battle or campaign. Indeed, there is specific documentation that indicates the people of the Clan Ranald were not forced out during that rising. On 15th August 1745 Neill MacNeill "in Canna" wrote to his brother in Mull concerning the landing of Prince Charles Edward Stuart in Arisaig. Neill referred to the raising of "the whole of Clanronald his men" and closed, saying, "I am not sure whether I go to the standard or not as I have some business with Clanronald". Unfortunately, the "business" is not explained, but it seems clear that Neill was undecided whether to join the Jacobite army at that point and certainly was not being forced.<sup>4</sup>

This information shows that in the Clan Ranald the people were not puppets of the chiefs, that they would take stands against their

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1. For a full discussion of this topic, see below, pp.423-29.
  2. See below, p.425.
  3. There is no evidence except the highly suspect testimony of prisoners in 1746 who were trying, reasonably, to save themselves from execution or transportation to the colonies by saying they had been forced out.
  4. Campbell of Stonefield Papers GD14/29.



leaders if so inclined. The depositions in the early period, the ultimatum John Moydartach put to Montrose in 1644, the pro-Jacobite actions of the people of Atholl in 1688-89 against the Whig Marquis of Atholl and the evidence from 1745-46 all testify to a notable independence of spirit and action on the part of the Gaels; and in every case mentioned above, the people or their spokesmen were taking a conservative stand against an individual and/or a cause found unacceptable. This existence of an independent spirit makes the uniform<sup>5</sup> attachment of the peoples of the Clan Ranald to their conservative Gaelic point of view all the more significant.

The tenants below the rank of duin-usal in the Clan Ranald had several functions other than the basic military duty to the kindred. Firstly, they paid loyalty and rent, often through the local duin-usal, to the chief. Often in the traditional period this rent was paid in labour and in kind. Rent in kind has been discussed; briefly, it was payment in produce such as poultry, dairy products and grain. Labour took a variety of forms and was important to the kindred. These tenants worked their own share of land and also laboured for their immediate superior. No chief or duin-usal was intended to engage in heavy manual labour on the land; they had other functions. This work was left to those in the lower ranks. Crops were tended and manured, peat needed for fuel was cut and the cattle were tended. The people often continued to pay rent to the chief, even when he was outlawed or in exile. No specific

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5. Only the 1745-46 instance of Alexander MacDonald of Boisdale exists as an example of a less than totally unified approach to a conservative issue in the Clan Ranald and it must be remembered that this individual was seeking to prevent the mass of the people from the lower ranks from joining the conservative Jacobite camp and their chief.

documentation has been uncovered on this topic concerning the Clan Ranald, but it is sure that Allan MacDonald, Captain of Clan Ranald and his brother, Ranald, were well maintained when they were banished to France after the Battle of Killiecrankie and Ranald was also supported when he was forced to reside there after the collapse of the 1715 Rising. Insights into the workings of this system can be gained by looking at the evidence collected in the "Appin Murder" case. It seems that when Charles Stewart of Ardsheal, who led the Appin Stewarts in that last Jacobite rebellion, was in exile in France, his kindred continued to pay their rent to him through agents such as Allen Breac Stewart. In some cases, this put them in the position of paying their rent twice, once to their leader Ardsheal and once to the government's factor, Colin Campbell of Glenure.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the nature of surviving documentation the commoners are not as well covered as either the kindred's daoin-uaisle or the chiefs. But they were important and enough material has survived to illustrate how they fit into the structure of the clan and to give insights into their situation.

Land generally went out to these folk in two basic manners: either they held their portion of land from the local duin-uasal, usually a tacksman, or they held directly of the chief with a number of others in a sort of communal relationship. Those holding directly from the proprietor have been termed "joint tenants" and their situation is better documented than those who held of the daoin-uaisle. A description of such a farm in the Hebrides has survived:

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6. Stewarts, Stewarts of Appin, op.cit., p.147.

A small tenant farm is a little commonwealth of villagers, whose houses or huts are huddled close together with too little regard to form, order, or cleanliness, and whose lands are yearly divided by lot for tillage, while their cattle graze on the pasture in common. 7

In the 1721 Judicial Rental of the forfeited Clan Ranald estate about half of the land was let out to joint tenants and half to daoine-uaisle.<sup>8</sup> The joint tenants held their land without written leases by virtue of oral agreements, usually on a yearly basis,<sup>9</sup> but despite this they appear to have enjoyed a notable security of tenure.<sup>10</sup>

In 1721 some of these joint tenant farms on the Clan Ranald lands were held by only two tenants,<sup>11</sup> on some as many as eight tenants were listed<sup>12</sup> and in other cases a few tenants appeared and testified for the entire hamlet, not giving the total number of occupants.<sup>13</sup> Each tenant paid his own rent, which varied depending on the size of his portion and he paid

a proportional part of Two stones cheese two Quarts butter & two sheep payable by the whole town. 14

In several places throughout the rental observations such as the following occur. In a small farm in Moidart "Angus MacRory" and Ranald MacDonald shared the rent but

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7. John Sinclair, ed. The Statistical Account of Scotland., Vol.10, (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1794), p.368. This description is of Harris in about 1790 but this was an area where little agricultural development had taken place and so it can be said to offer a fair image of the situation on Clan Ranald's Hebridean holdings in the early 18th century.

8. GD201/5/1257/August 1718.

9. Ibid.

10. See below, and also see Shaw, op.cit., p.70.

11. GD201/5/1257/2/35,36 & 43.

12. GD201/5/1257/1/8 and GD201/5/1257/2/54.

13. GD201/5/1257/2/44.

14. GD201/5/1257/1/10.



Ranald ought to pay more than the above Ten -  
Eleven pounds Scots [his rent] but that he  
had an abatement of the same as being an old  
man. 15

The Judicial Rental of 1748 reveals a quite similar set of conditions with one notable exception; in the 1748 rental the number of listed tenants on certain joint tenant farms is much larger than the 1721 maximum of eight. In fact, on one farm, Kirktown, Isle of Canna, twenty-one tenants appear.<sup>16</sup> From the documentation it is uncertain whether this indicates a notable increase in the number of those living on the larger joint tenant holdings or (more likely) if it simply indicates that the 1748 rental was compiled by a more thorough man. Certainly, the proportion of small tenant farms held by two, three or four individuals in 1748 was similar to the 1721 situation.

When comparing the situation and standard of living of the commoners who were on joint tenant farms with those who lived under a duin-uasal, it was observed:

In regard of living, the tacksmens tenants are  
in much the same footing with those who hold  
the same quantity of land of the proprietor. 17

In this period all these tenants paid either the local duin-uasal or the chief in both cash and produce, or casualties. In 1718 in Canna "Finaly MacArthur" and three other tenants in Keill each paid "for  $\frac{1}{2}$  penny land the sum of 13 merks Scots & 1 sheep".<sup>18</sup> At the same time the more substantial Donald MacLean in Moidart paid "4 score merks Scots 1 Quart of Butter & a stone of cheese or 4 merks &

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15. GD201/5/1257/1/21.

16. E744/1/p.2.

17. Sinclair, Statistical Account, op.cit., Vol.10, p.368.

18. GD201/5/1257/4/ 64.

1 sheep or 2 merks".<sup>19</sup>

As there were no written contracts the tenants had no guarantee of a long term occupation of their holdings, but in reality loyal tenants were more highly valued than a mere rent and the evidence that has survived indicates that these common people enjoyed a notable security of tenure. Testimony from a 1772 court case between Colin MacDonald of Boisdale and Ranald of Clan Ranald over kelping rights reveals that many families in South Uist and Benbecula had resided in the same area for generations.<sup>20</sup> Lauchlan MacCulloch is an example from this case; he was a seventy year old resident in Liniclate, Benbecula, and "he was born in Liniclate, where his Father and Grandfather also resided as Tenants to [the MacDonalds of] Benbecula".<sup>21</sup>

In the late 1740's a report was submitted to the Commissioners of the Forfeited Estates concerning the Barrisdale section of the Glengarry estate on the west coast and the Kinlochmoidart portion of Clan Ranald's mainland holdings. This report is valuable when examining the circumstances and conditions of the lower ranking Clan Ranald tenants in the traditional period.

The Inhabitants of this Estate may justly be accounted among the honestest of the commonalty in this part of the west coast, and Barring the Influence of the priests who have always infested this Estate and neighbourhood, The poor people seem very well disposed to live regularly and pay obedience to the Law.

This Estate being rocky & mountaneous is fit only for pasture and the rearing of Black cattle; There being little or no arable ground the Inhabitants live chiefly upon the produce of

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19. GD201/5/1257/1/ 1.

20. GD50/216/43.

21. GD50/216/43/p.5.

their cattle; they however sow some Barley and a few grey oats and the raising of Potatos is much attended to by them. 22

The Forfeited Estates report continues to describe the diet of the people on Kinlochmoidart's lands in detail.

They have Bread all winter and in Spring & summer are supplied with fish, potatos, Butter & cheese and a little beef. They have not yet got any gardens, nor have ever seen any sort of greens or garden stuff in that country.

There are no Corn mills in this country. The people sett fire to the sheaves of corn and gather up the grain after the straw is burnt and make it into a coarse kind of meal by a handmill called a Quirn. 23

and the report closes, saying that the entire area

which is at present inhabited by Roman Catholics who submit implicitly all points of controversy to the decrees of the priests who have the Impudence to carry their influence so far as to inflict corporal punishment upon offenders, which indeed is partly encouraged, for this reason. That there is no sherriff substitute or Justice of the peace in the whole country of Lochaber, Moydart, Knoydart, Arisaig & the two Morors. Except the Sherriff Substitute at Fort William whoses [sic] Residence is so remote from the greatest part of these countries (which constitute at least a district of 200 miles in circumfrence) that it is impossible Justice can be distributed in that extensive Space. 24

Here, the author forgets the clan-based baron bailie courts, the Clan Ranald's own bailies and daoin-uaisle who, along with the priests, oversaw these Gaelic folk but from the government's point of view the report is correct. No government authority was present in the area; the only justice and social management that existed over them grew out of their own ancient traditions, their kin-based society centred in

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22. E786/42. For full discussion of the farming and the run-rig system, see Walker, op.cit., and Gray, op.cit.

23. E786/42.

24. Ibid.



the institution that was their clan, and in their religion.

These Clan Ranald folk below the duin-usal class were a complex and mixed lot. Some were MacDonalds as truly as were the chiefs of Clan Ranald; others, like the kindred's less substantial MacMhuirichs, Beatons and MacIntyres, who had come off their own duin-usal class family generations earlier and had neither professional position or notable holdings of their own to justify their continued inclusion in the duin-usal class, were valued members of the Clan Ranald and yet quite proudly not MacDonalds. Even in early times all these people had surnames and were as aware of them as anyone today is aware of his. It is only the fact that patronymics were largely used in documents that have survived that has confused modern writers into claiming that these people either had no family name or, even more absurd, that they did not know their own name. When a person in a Clan Ranald document signed in Benbecula in 1625 was identified as "Joanne mc donald mc allane vc eane Capitani de Clanronald" or "Donald gorme McJames vic allan de Boridaill" or "Malcolmis mc ean vic gilliechallium", it certainly did not mean that these men had no surname, it usually meant that they were MacDonalds and just used their patronymics to identify them among the kindred's many MacDonalds. In that same 1625 document "Neill Mceachin" servitor to John Moydartach and "Joane mcWirrich" servitor to Ranald of Castle Borve in Bebecula did not feel the need to use their patronymic designation (which they certainly had) because there was no other Neill MacEachen who served the Captain of Clan Ranald and no other John MacMhuirich serving Benbecula.<sup>25</sup> And later in 1737 when the

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25. RS37/3/127.

less substantial "Angus Mc Ean voire [from Kildonan in South Uist] pd. his mutton to Ranald McDon. [and] his hens to the house" everyone involved, and especially Angus, knew his unlisted surname. This was simply a quick appellation used on the estate's internal records. Others on the list appeared simply as "Ye Benb. officer, John McInish vic Rory, Donald the Smith, Nile Tinker, Murdo, Hugh Ross widow and John McConchyduff"; all were as well known as or perhaps better known than others listed as "Angus McLellan, John Beaton, John Morison, Donald McDonald, Lachl. McMurrich and Rory McIntyre".<sup>26</sup> Clearly, surnames existed and were known; they were not always used simply because the patronymic was at once more descriptive in an area where a given family name could be overly plentiful and also because a patronymic was a source of personal pride, recognised and encouraged by society.

In the 16th and 17th centuries small holdings were not at a premium as they were to be in the 19th century and incoming tenants were welcomed if they had a skill or some other attractive aspect and if they were willing to pay allegiance and rent to their duin-usal and through him to the chief. Some came into the Clan Ranald because of their special talent or skill and on their death left their descendants to form yet another kin-group in the clan. The Mac-Mhuirich poets, Beaton physicians and MacIntyre pipers have been discussed, also there was Marshall the scribe, MacQuarrie the tailor and the black man who served Allan of Clan Ranald before the 1715 Rising and whose descendants came to be known as Buies or Bowies. Others were welcomed into the clan because as broken men (men from

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26. GD201/5/1219/1.

broken or landless clans) they had no other home and yet were desirable as fighting men in warlike times; the refugee MacIains of Ardnamurchan are a case in point because many of that scattered kindred took shelter with their MacDonald kinsmen in the Clan Ranald.<sup>27</sup> Other members of the Clan Ranald certainly would have stemmed from local stock older than the MacDonald chiefs, even stretching back to the times before the Clan Ruairi held the ancient Lordship of Garmoran. And, of course, over the generations at a slow but steady pace other typical west Highland and Hebridean and Irish kin-groups would have quite naturally moved in and out of the clan territories with marriage and the shifting fortunes of their own small families.

It will be useful and of interest to specify the manner in which certain distinctive kin-groups became established in the Clan Ranald. A few cases are clearly documented, in other instances oral tradition, labelled as such, will be used and in one exciting case this current search has been able to support a bit of South Uist oral tradition with documentary evidence. This is the question of the origin of the South Uist name Buie or Bowie.

This name certainly stems from the Gaelic MacGilliebuie, "son of the yellow servant" or "son of the yellow lad". There is an oral tradition in South Uist that Allan of Clan Ranald, during his exile and military service in Europe after Killiecrankie, took a black man, a Moor, into his service and returned to South Uist with him. This black man was a rarity in the Hebrides where an duine dubh, Gaelic for "the black man", had been used to describe an individual with black hair and/or dark complexion. The tradition has it that

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27. See above, p.55.



Allan's servant had a light appearance for a Moor and so this sallow complexion seemed yellow to the locals: hence the origin of the name, "son of the yellow servant".<sup>28</sup> Others have disagreed, speculating that the Bowie family simply descended from some individual with yellow hair or who habitually wore a yellow cloak or some other distinctive yellow garment. However, in the Delvine collection a Clan Ranald document was recently uncovered that mentions "the african secretarie".<sup>29</sup> This is the only mention of this person, but it shows that at precisely the right time, 8th July 1702, according to the South Uist tradition of the Moor, an individual known as the African secretary was functioning for Allan of Clan Ranald and in this period Allan's famous Gaelic court was centred in Ormiclate Castle, South Uist, which is close to the Beinn Mhor home tradition has given this "black Duncan of the gun" (the traditional name of this black servant). The evidence is not conclusive, but when the oral tradition is combined with the document a strong case exists to indicate that this sallow-skinned "black Duncan of the gun" did exist and was the progenitor of the Buies or Bowies of South Uist.

The origins of other distinctive Clan Ranald names are possible to identify. The Marshalls of South Uist and Benbecula are certainly descended from an individual brought in by Donald MacDonald of Benbecula to act as his servitor. On 17th August 1713 this first Marshall was identified by Benbecula as "Anthony Marshall my servitor".<sup>30</sup> The MacEachens were centred in Howbeg, South Uist (and still are), but also settled throughout the Clan Ranald

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28. Oral tradition, Dr. Alaster MacLean, Lochboisdale, South Uist.

29. MS 1105/143.

30. FFEP, 1715, Box 140, 17 Aug. 1713.

territories.<sup>31</sup> The Gaelic name MacEachen means "son of Hector" and this family is descended from Hector, the second son of Ruairi MacDonald, the 3rd Chief of Clan Ranald (D.C.1481), so they are actually a distinct section of the Clan Ranald MacDonalds.<sup>32</sup> Several MacEachens served the Clan Ranald as servitors<sup>33</sup> and at least one as a factor.<sup>34</sup> In a series of letters written by Donald MacDonald, younger of Clan Ranald, during the Restoration to the Ogilvies of Airlie, there is a steady discussion of hawks and falcons. On 29th August 1664 Donald mentions that he had sent "ane cast of hawks to your Ld/ this yeire acording to my dewty".<sup>35</sup> And in 1671 Donald was "making so bold" as to "present your Ld/ this year with a Caste of them, being ane falcone & a torselle [male falcon]".<sup>36</sup> The Clan Ranald name "Falconer" apparently stems from those who kept these birds; indeed, in a rental of South Uist in 1719 an individual is simply described as "John the falconer"<sup>37</sup> and in a rental dated 1721-1722 of the same Boisdale area of South Uist appears "John Falconer".<sup>38</sup> The few MacQuarries who are found in 19th century Clan Ranald rentals of South Uist and Benbecula certainly stem from Neill MacQuarrie who served the family of Clan Ranald as "tailor in Nuntown" Benbecula in the 1770's.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the name Campbell is commonly found on lists of tenants in South Uist and along with the expected MacDonalds,

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31. For example, see GD201/2/23 (Glenuig, Moidart) and GD201/5/67 Peninerine, South Uist).

32. Adam, op.cit., p.317.

33. FFEP, 1715, Box 140, 17 June 1713 and RS37/3/127 (1625).

34. GD201/5/4 (1756).

35. Airlie Muniments, GD16/34/115.

36. GD16/34/184-2 and GD16/34/129 & 184-1.

37. GD201/5/1258.

38. FFEP, 1715, Box 140, Rental 1721-22.

39. GD201/5/1179; GD237/102/1; GD201/5/205 & 207; GD201/5/1233/18,27,28 & 31 and oral tradition, Dr. MacLean, South Uist.

MacEachens and MacMhuirichs who helped in Prince Charles Edward's escape from South Uist in 1746 a certain Donald Campbell from South Uist figured prominently.<sup>40</sup> The oral tradition in South Uist is that Campbell of Barbreck and some of his people were captured at the Battle of Inverlochy<sup>41</sup> and held on South Uist where one of this party, possibly a son of Barbreck's, eventually settled. The Campbells who descended from this man became a part of the South Uist community, turned catholic and served the Clan Ranald loyally.<sup>42</sup>

As early as 1718 some people on the Clan Ranald holdings were signing "Donald ffoullier alias McCoyeller" or "Donald Mcdonald alias Mcean vic inish" or "John Mcdonald alias mc alister vic uston" or "Hector McEachan alias Mcoilduy vic ean" or "Angus Campbell alias Mc alister".<sup>43</sup> In this 1718 case it seems clear that these people were simply giving their surname and under the alias giving their patronymic. The two cases of Hector MacEachen and Angus Campbell make this conclusion obvious because neither was changing to the dominant MacDonald surname and, in any case, Hector MacEachen was already commonly understood to be a MacDonald. However, in 1822 a different situation seems to have been documented on a List of Estate Arrears. On this list appeared "John MacDonald alias McVarish", "Ewan Macdonald alias McIsaac", "Malcolm Macdonald alias McIsaac", four other "Macdonalds alias McIsaacs".<sup>44</sup> Here, perhaps, is a documented case of a group of MacIsaacs (and one "MacVarish") changing their surnames to a more

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40. MS 3735/429.

41. See Iain Luim's poem to the Battle of Inverlochy where he says to John Moydartach, "It pleases me that you have Barbreck in your power". MacKenzie, op.cit., pp.26-27.

42. Oral tradition, Dr. MacLean, South Uist.

43. GD201/5/125/5.

44. GD201/5/1215/42.



well-known one. There is no explanation as to why this change was taking place or to why the eight other listed MacIsaacs did not change their names. It is true that only one of this family in Moidart did change his name (six did not) and, on the other hand, in Eigg six MacIsaacs did change (and one did not).

One interesting pattern concerning kin-groups is discernible in the Clan Ranald throughout the period under consideration. Most typical clan surnames are commonly found throughout the estate. MacEachens, MacMhuirichs, MacIntyres, Beatons, MacGillivrays and others may have been centred in one area, such as Howbeg for the MacEachens or Stilligarry for the MacMhuirichs, but through the years members of their kin-groups tended to spread over the entirety of the Clan Ranald holdings. But certain other names tend to be quite notably centred in one or perhaps two areas, such as the MacLellans who are found in South Uist and more particularly in the small isle between Uist and Barra, Eriskay; the Gillies who were centred in Morar; the MacIsaacs, found most commonly in Moidart and later in Eigg; and most remarkable of all these static kindreds, the MacArthurs and Jamiesons, always numerous on Canna and almost never found outside that island in any Clan Ranald context. Tradition has it that the MacArthurs in Canna originated in Skye (as did that Island's few MacLeods),<sup>45</sup> but no evidence has been uncovered to explain why some Clan Ranald kin-groups were quite mobile and others almost completely locked into one area. However, it is possible to note that the mobile families all held considerable power within the Clan Ranald, whereas the less mobile kindreds seldom if ever achieved a

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45. This information kindly supplied through personal correspondence with Dr. John Lorne Campbell of Canna, 9.8.77,

position of great influence. Therefore, it seems reasonable to speculate that these influential families could more easily find varied positions and holdings for their favoured offspring, while members of these less powerful kin-groups had to be content to remain in the area of their birth.

The commoners in the Clan Ranald thus stemmed from a variety of sources. The MacDonald commoners descended from MacDonald chiefs and daoine-uisle, as did the MacEachens. The MacMhuirich, Beaton and MacIntyre commoners originated in the kindred's professional duine-uisle families and others such as the Bowies, Falconers and MacQuharries descended from individuals who held minor posts within the kindred, but who had seldom if ever held duine-uisle status.

All these diverse peoples who combined to make up the Clan Ranald shared the uncommon Gaelic pride in ancestry and they shared much more. They lived together under their MacDonald chiefs and experienced the same triumphs such as Inverlochy and disasters such as the destruction of every man, woman and child on Eigg by the MacLeods. These successes and losses tended to fall evenly on all segments of the clan with the major exception that in battle the poorer people were not sent into battle but were led into the conflict behind the kindred's daoine-uisle who always bore the first shock of battle, thus performing their basic function and often paying for their privileged position in society with blood. And it all passed into a common and extremely active oral tradition that was the delight and passion of all classes and naturally helped to keep a nostalgia for the old days and the old ways very much alive among this collection of conservative peoples. These Gaels shared this

conservative Gaelic culture and language, lived alongside each other, inter-married among themselves and their equally tradition-bound neighbours, experienced the same political and social developments and followed the same religious creed.

This communal spirit was reinforced by the custom of fosterage, by which the chief and his daoin-uaisle boarded their children with foster-parents from lower ranks in the kindred. These young Gaels were brought up sharing the everyday lives of their people in ordinary households. Bonds formed between the young sons of chiefs and daoin-uaisle on one side and their foster-parents, foster-brothers and foster-sisters on the other and cut across class boundaries, both directions. Foster-brothers had a special relationship for life and in a more general context the experience of living with a less substantial family gave the youngster who would eventually lead the kindred an insight into the lives of the ordinary clansmen and an appreciation of them.

Finally, in the court case of 1772 between Colin of Boisdale and Ranald of Clan Ranald over rights to the increasingly lucrative kelp shores between South Uist and Benbecula, some fascinating testimony is given by several of the area's small tenants. The eventual outcome of this law-suit is not of particular significance to this study; however, the folk memory of these tenants recorded in the trial's records concerning the almost total freedom they and their forefathers had enjoyed in the traditional period to order their own lives is of the utmost moment. And this freedom did not simply apply to kelp, an item that in the early period was of only limited value; also the tenants themselves had the liberty to organise the division of the land in question for the more significant



raising of crops and grazing of livestock. Allan MacDonald, aged fifty-three, testified that

the Rocks belonging to the Island of Hestamul, with the Ware growing thereon, were divided among the Tenants of Liniclate [Benbecula] before his Day, and that the Use made of the sea-ware was for manuring their Lands, for that there was no Kelp made then, nor for some Time afterwards: That he does not know how the said Division came to be made, but that the Tenants of Liniclate had each their particular shore, known separately according to the Division of the Lands they possessed in Liniclate; and that he has known the Tenants take the Ware annually from the Rocks accordingly until People were sent to live on the said Island of Hestamul; but that he has known, even after that Period, his Father take his own Share of the said Wreck for Manuring his lands. 46

Lauchlan MacCulloch, aged seventy, later stated

that these shores, Islands, and Rocks [smaller islands and rocks, lying around the coast and near Hestamul] were divided as old as he remembers, among the Tenants proportionally; but that they used them notwithstanding according to their Pleasure: That the Island and Rocks of Hestamul were also divided among them which they used in raising crops from it, eating the Gras thereof, and carrying away the sea-ware. 47

Concerning the question of when the local people divided the shores of Hestamul, Lauchlan MacCulloch continued:

that he could point out at this Day the Division that he was informed was made of old of the Sea-Ware among the said Tenants of Liniclate, which they were in use to take every second year for the manure of their Lands: and that he was also informed such Division of the ware took place among the said Tenants nine score years ago, of which he has been informed by old men, particularly Ewan Morison and Michael MacLellan, both residing in Liniclate, who are long ago dead, about sixty Years ago: that they told so to the Deponents Father, who afterwards told him. 48

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46. GD50/216/43/p.3.

47. Ibid., p.5.

48. Ibid., p.6.

If Lauchlan's estimate of the time lapsed since the division "among the said Tenants of Liniclate" is correct, it would put it before 1600 and if he is in error a score of years either way it does not matter. What does matter is that he clearly felt the tenants of Liniclate had decided among themselves how to divide the produce of these offshore islands and rocks and used this produce "according to their Pleasure". This is an example of a mid 18th century oral tradition and it demonstrates that Lauchlan felt a great deal of freedom had been given the less substantial tenants in the early period when land was not at a premium and people were. There were no pressures of overpopulation and so tenants were left free to order their own lives with, of course, the kindred's hierarchy being available to settle disputes, but not feeling any need to pressure their followers. And even in the mid 18th century when the lands were becoming more valuable and the population on the increase, still the pressures were not, as yet, great. As is seen in the testimony of Alexander MacDonald, "the Son of the Wadsetter of Liniclate". He stated that

Ronald Macdonald [elder of Clan Ranald], about 30 or 35 years ago, did put a Tenant to reside in the Island of Hestamul, whose Name was Alexander Macdonald: that the Deponent's Father consented to Clanranald putting Alexander Macdonald into the Island of Hestamul:- That Alexander Macdonald was bound to pay no Rent, being a poor man and a Friend to Clanranald, and also to the Deponent's Father. 49

Allan MacDonald, "another of the Wadsetter's [of Liniclate] sons" gave the same account and Ranald MacDonald of Torlum, aged seventy-two, said that

he was present and heard both Clanranald and the Wadsetter of Liniclate advise Alexander

Macdonald to go and live in Hestamul, and that they and the Gentlemen of the Country made a Contribution for buying him a ccw. 50

And it was during this period, according to the statement of Allan MacDonald, the first quoted witness in this case,<sup>51</sup> that the people were still permitted to gather seaweed for fertiliser. In other words, the poor Alexander MacDonald was allowed to live on the island free, with his cow, and the area tenants were able to continue to enjoy the sea-ware of the island for their crops as they had done for generations.

This is not merely a study of feudal landholding and a few well-fixed landholders. In the traditional period the Clan Ranald was a Gaelic community built around kin and kinship. To fully comprehend the wrenching changes that were to come upon these diverse Gaelic people who were united in the institution that was the Clan Ranald and to comprehend the emotional scars that these changes have left on their descendants, it is necessary to understand how different the traditional Gaelic world was from the stratified British class-based society that was slowly replacing it. Traditionally, the Clan Ranald was never an example of primeval democracy or communal perfection; it possessed an entrenched hierarchy and Highland society was all too capable of spawning extreme violence, especially after the collapse of the Lordship of the Isles, but equally the Clan Ranald was the result of centuries of evolution in which Irish origins, kinship, common sense and the need to survive in a hostile environment had combined to create a social institution where loyalty naturally and necessarily flowed in both directions throughout the ranks of the

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50. Ibid.

51. See above, p.334.



kindred. In the traditional period the Clan Ranald exhibited many real and appealing inter-class ties built around kinship and mutual need and it was noted for its conservative Gaelic culture that was shared among all its people. In these central aspects traditional Gaeldom was the antithesis of what was to follow.